



A CROWN OF SHAME

BY THE AUTHOR OF

MY SISTER THE ACTRESS



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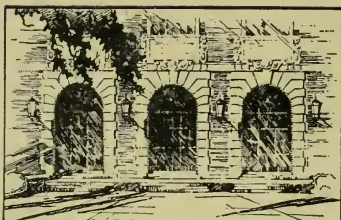
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A CROWN OF SHAME.

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A NOVEL.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF

‘LOVE’S CONFLICT,’ ‘MY SISTER THE ACTRESS,’
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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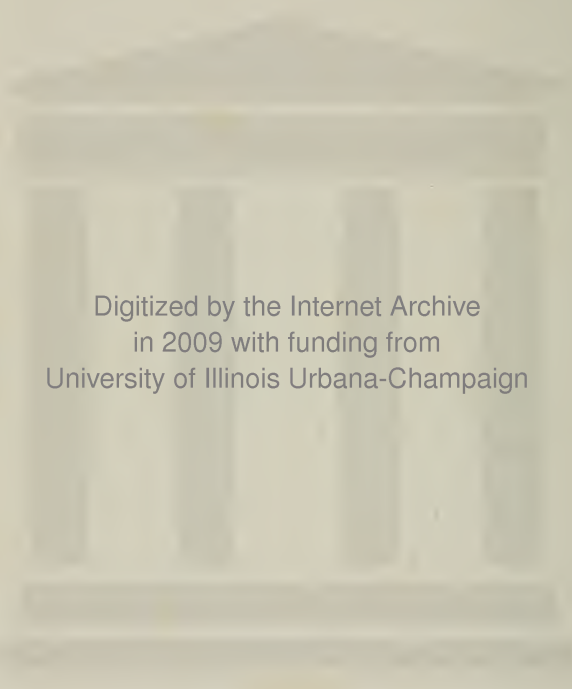
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A CROWN OF SHAME.

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CHAPTER I.

HE left Liz weeping over the dead body of her father. How paltry all other troubles seemed to be, as she did so. She had no power, at that moment, to realise any fact but one,—that he had left her, and without a warning. He, who had been her sole protector and companion, beside whom she had walked

every moment of her life, sharing his knowledge, and his duties, and his cares, had gone forth into the dreamland without her, and for the future she must struggle through life as best she might, alone. Liz was not ignorant of the cause of her father's death, but she had been quite unprepared for it. She had known for some time past that he had a weak heart, but men lived with such, sometimes to their three score years and ten. He had passed a tranquil and unexciting life. The passions which had raged stormily perhaps in his youth had forsaken him in his latter days, and he had appeared likely to live on to a good old age. But the events of the last week had greatly upset him. Liz had no doubt, as she looked at his pale, calm features, that his sudden death lay, in a great

measure, at Maraquita's door, and the fact did not make her feel more tenderly towards her adopted sister. But the infant was wailing in her arms, and she felt that something must be done at once. This was no time for weeping, or inaction. She turned on her heel, with set features, and teeth closely clenched together, and passed into the outer room to summon her negress attendant Chloe to her aid. Chloe was conspicuous only by her absence, but on the threshold of the outer door she found the yellow girl, Rosa, slowly rocking herself to and fro.

‘What are you doing here?’ demanded Lizzie sternly. ‘Have you not brought me into enough trouble already?’

The girl turned round and caught the folds of her dress, and buried her

face in them, crying. The coloured people are very emotional, and a sudden remorse had stabbed the depths of poor Rosa's heart.

'Oh, Miss Lizzie,' she sobbed, 'I'se so sorry the poor Doctor dead! Massa Courcelles tell me so as he went out. The dear good Doctor, who was so berry kind to me in my sickness, and so good to my little Carlo, and now he gone too, and me nebber see him any more, and my heart is broke, Miss Liz, my heart is broke!'

This tribute to her dead father's virtues affected Liz more than anything else could have done.

'If *you* are so sorry for his loss, Rosa,' she answered gently, 'what do you suppose *I* must feel. I seem to have lost everything to-day—*everything*,' she added, in a vague and weary tone.

‘Oh, Missy Liz, I’s e so sorry!’ repeated Rosa. ‘But what can I do to help you, and to take some of dis trouble off you? Let me do something, Missy Liz, to show I’s e real sorry.’

‘You can go up to the White House, Rosa, and tell Mr Courtney of—of—*this*, and say I should like to see him as soon as he can come to me. I can’t find Chloe anywhere.’

‘Ah! dat Chloe no good. She too stupid!’ cried Rosa, with all a negress’s jealousy. ‘And may I come back, too, Missy Liz, with Massa Courtney, and help you nurse the baby, same as you helped me with little Carlo?’

The allusion to the child brought the trouble it had caused her too vividly to Lizzie’s mind. She dropped into a chair, and burst into tears.

‘Oh, Rosa! Rosa! you have spoiled my life for me. How could you be so cruel?’

The yellow girl crawled on her knees to the side of the Doctor’s daughter.

‘Missy Liz, what I done so bad? Isn’t dat baby your own baby, then?’

‘Of course it isn’t! How could you think such a thing of me? It is a little nurse - child which was left in charge of my dear father, and I was minding it for him. But you made Monsieur de Courcelles believe that it belongs to me, and you have parted us for ever. He was to have been my husband, Rosa, but he never will be so now; never—never!’

Rosa’s eyes opened with surprise.

‘Missy Liz, you must tell him I’s a liar. I know noting of de baby, only I see it on your bed, and I’s so sorry

I speak to Massa Courcelles about it. It was de debbil spoke, Missy Liz, and not me. Something seem to come in my head and say dat chile like my little Carlo, and you no better den me. But I see now I'se all wrong, and you too good to do such a drefful thing. You tell Massa Courcelles I'se a liar, and it'll be all right again, Missy Liz.'

'No, Rosa, it will never be right again in the way you mean. I *did* tell Monsieur de Courcelles what you say, but he refused to believe me. No one will believe me now, I am afraid,' said Liz mournfully, 'and I must bear the brunt of my own rash promise.'

'Oh! Missy Liz, must you keep dat baby dat isn't yours, and take de trouble of it all your life?'

'I think so, Rosa. I have nowhere to send it; and you would not have me turn

it out on the cold world alone? No, my dear dead father left it to me as a sacred charge,' cried Lizzie, weeping, 'and I will guard it, whatever it may cost me. It will be something to do for his sake.'

'Oh, Miss Lizzie!' exclaimed Rosa, awed by a display of heroism she could not understand, 'you berry good woman! I nebber know till dis day how good a woman you are. Let me stay with you, Miss Lizzie. Send dat Chloe back to huts, and let me be your servant, 'stead of her. Chloe don't know nuffin of children. *She* not had a little boy, like me. Let me nurse dat baby for you, and I will be faithful, trust me, Missy Liz, and nebber let de debbil speak through my mouth again.'

'I believe you, Rosa,' replied Lizzie. 'I believe you are sorry for the mischief you have done, and that you

would undo it if you could. You were a good mother to little Carlo, and you would be a kind nurse to this poor little one. If it can be managed, it shall be arranged so, but we can do nothing without the leave of Mr Courtney. Go now and tell him of the grief I am in, and we will talk of these things another day.'

'But I will come back and hold de baby for you, Missy Liz!' exclaimed the yellow girl, as she set off towards the White House.

Liz walked back into the death chamber, and mechanically performed the necessary offices to prepare her father's body for the grave. She did not weep again as she did so. The blow of her two great losses, coming so quickly one upon the other, had stunned her, and dried up the sources of her tears. She

would have time to think and weep, she thought, by-and-by. When Mr Courtney arrived post-haste in answer to her summons, his grief appeared to be scarcely less than her own. He had been sincerely and deeply attached to this erring friend of his youthful days, and had never anticipated losing him so soon. He shed tears freely over the silent corpse, and kept on assuring Lizzie that her future should be one of his first cares.

‘Don’t let that trouble you, my dear,’ he reiterated. ‘I looked upon your dear father as my brother, and you shall never miss his protection whilst I can extend it to you. From this moment, Lizzie, I shall regard you as my daughter, and as soon as the sad ceremonies which we must go through, are concluded, I shall carry you off to the

White House, and consider you second only in my affection to Maraquita.'

'Dear Mr Courtney, you are too good to me,' gasped Lizzie, 'but—but—please don't speak of my future to me to-day.'

'No, no, of course not. It was thoughtless of me,' said the planter; 'but I did it with the view to set your mind at ease. To-day we must give up entirely to thoughts of my dear and valued friend.'

He imagined that the girl's mind was too distracted to dwell on anything but her great loss; but Lizzie had remembered that before the morrow, the scandal that was being spread abroad concerning her would reach his ears, and render her unfit in his eyes to be the companion of his daughter.

When he had told her what arrangements he had made for the funeral,

which (according to the custom in hot climates) was to take place that evening, Mr Courtney, with a farewell grasp of his dead friend's hand, turned to leave the bungalow, when his eye fell upon the yellow girl, Rosa, squatting on the floor with the baby in her arms.

‘What infant is that?’ he demanded indifferently, for it was so wrapped up in flannel that he could not see its face.

Liz had anticipated the question, and dreaded it; but she felt evasion would be useless, and had not attempted to send the child out of his sight.

‘It is a little girl which was confided to my dear father's care,’ she answered, in a low voice. ‘And he was going to consult Dr Martin at the Fort about a nurse to take the charge of it, when he was called away.’

Mr Courtney's eyes opened somewhat at her explanation.

‘Is it a white child then?’ he asked.

‘Yes, it is a white child,’ replied Lizzie, with a deep sigh, as she stood trembling at what might follow. But Mr Courtney said no more on the subject. Perhaps his mind was too full of his lost friend to think of minor things, anyway he left the bungalow without another word or look, and Lizzie breathed more freely when he had gone. She spent the remainder of the day beside the remains of the father whom she had loved so well, and when the sun had sunk in the west, and the cool sea breezes commenced to blow over San Diego, she followed his coffin to the little European burial ground, which was situated on the top of a hill, and in full view of the glorious ocean. She saw that there

were many friends, both white and coloured, gathered round the open grave but she was in no fit condition to recognise who they were. Only, as the last words of the solemn service were concluded, and she heard the sods of earth rattle on the coffin lid, and felt as if she must throw herself in with them, and be buried with all she loved best in this world, she found some one supporting her failing steps on either side, and looking up saw she was standing between Mr Courtney and Captain Norris.

‘Come, my dear child,’ whispered the former. ‘It is all over now. Let us see you safely to your home.’

They led her between them back to the empty bungalow, and the three friends sat down together in the sitting-room, whilst Rosa squatted in the

verandah with Maraquita's baby in her arms. Liz, making an effort to battle with her emotion, busied herself with setting some light refreshment before her guests. Mr Courtney drank a glass of iced sherbet in silence, and then cleared his throat as though to force himself to speak.

‘Lizzie, my dear, I have a good deal to say to you, and I wish to say it now. I might leave it till to-morrow, but I think it will do you good to fix your mind at once upon business, and to settle what you are to do in the future.’

Lizzie turned a little paler than she had been. She had understood her future to be settled that morning. But she guessed why it required further explanation now.

‘Captain Norris, than whom I think

your dear father had no warmer friend, has been talking to me on the subject this afternoon, and has consented to become the guardian and trustee of your interests.'

'I am of age,' interrupted Lizzie, with open eyes ; 'I require no guardian.'

'Stop, my dear, and let me finish what I have to say. You may not require a personal guardian, but your monetary interests may need looking after. I am not likely to forget you at my death, Lizzie.'

'Indeed, Mr Courtney, you are too good to me,' said Liz,—'as you were to my poor father,' she added, in a lower voice.

'Your father was my dearest friend : I can never forget that,' replied the planter ; 'and I am only following the dictates of my affection for him in making a suitable provision for his daughter. I have been

thinking the matter over deeply, Lizzie, and I have decided that I cannot spare you from amongst my coolies. Why should you not carry on the work from which your father has been so suddenly called away? I know you are competent to do so, from what he himself has told me, and in any difficult cases you can always call in the assistance of the Doctor from the Fort. What I propose is that you should continue to live in this bungalow (the furniture and effects of which I shall make over to you as your own property), and to work amongst the coloured people; and I will gladly pay you the same remuneration as heretofore. Don't you think it will be the best plan, Lizzie, and that you will be happier if you bravely try to forget your grief, in carrying on a life of activity and usefulness?'

‘I am *sure* it will be best,’ she answered, in a low tone.

Her pride, which had made her divine at once the cause of her benefactor’s change of mind, would have also prompted her to refuse his offers of assistance, but she was helpless in the matter. She had no friends to go to, no resources to fall back upon. What could she have done, left alone in San Diego, but live on charity, which she would rather have died than accept? Mr Courtney’s proposal was at least not a humiliating one. He offered her money in return for her labour, and she was resolved to earn it, and thanked Heaven she was capable of doing so. That he should not even have alluded to his promise of the morning wounded but did not surprise her. He had heard the wretched slander, which was doubtless already going the round of the

plantation, concerning her. Henri de Courcelles had, perhaps, repeated it, and Mr Courtney already regretted that he had held out hopes he could not fulfil. Well, he should not read her disappointment in her eyes. She would put a brave face on the matter, and battle (as best she could) for herself; for the oath she had taken to her dead father was doubly sacred, now that all hope of release from it was over.

‘We will do all in our power to make your life comfortable,’ continued Mr Courtney; ‘and you may always depend on me, Lizzie, as your friend.’

He did not include his wife’s and daughter’s friendship with his own, and Lizzie noticed the omission, and shrunk under it.

‘Mr Courtney,’ she said, in a firm voice, though her eyes were full of tears,

‘I thank you for your offers of assistance, and I accept them gratefully. I did not know till a few days back, the whole extent to which my poor father was indebted to you, but I shall never forget it, and if I can ever repay it in the slightest degree, I will.’

‘Hush, my dear! It was nothing. Don’t speak of it now.’

‘It was his *life*, Mr Courtney, and I should not be his daughter were I unmindful of it. I should have liked to relieve you of the burden, now *he* is gone, but I don’t know what I could do, without friends, and in a foreign country. So I will remain on (as you are good enough to propose), and work among your plantation hands, and do all I possibly can to return your kindness to us both.’

‘Lizzie, my dear, I don’t wish you to think of it as if it were a favour. The

obligation is quite as much on my side. And you mustn't speak of yourself as friendless, either, my dear. You have friends on all sides, I am sure of that. You know what *I* feel towards you ; and here is Captain Norris, grieving only second to myself for your loss ; and everyone in San Diego loves and respects you. You may take my word for that, Lizzie.'

Mr Courtney had risen, as if to take his departure, whilst he spoke, and now stood in the doorway, with his straw hat in his hand, and beckoned her towards him.

'By the way,' he added, in a lower tone, 'what do you intend to do about that child, Lizzie?' jerking his head towards Rosa and the baby.

'What should I do about it?' she returned. 'I know no place to send it to. It was in the charge of Mammy Lila, but

she died of the fever. I suppose I must keep it here.'

'Where are its parents?' demanded the planter inquisitively.

'It has none, Mr Courtney, or none who will own it.'

'Dear me! That is very strange, and very awkward. Who confided it to your father's care?'

'I am not at liberty to tell you, sir.'

'Do you know then?'

She paused for a moment, and then answered, in a husky tone,—

'Yes.'

'And you will not tell me, Lizzie?'

'I am bound under a solemn oath, Mr Courtney, not to reveal anything about that child, and I must beg of you not to question me.'

'It looks bad for you, my dear, and may be the cause of a great deal of future

unhappiness. There are not so many Europeans on the island that such an event can occur without comment ; and if you persist in holding your tongue on the subject, people *will* talk about it, and to your disadvantage.'

'Then they *must* talk, Mr Courtney,' replied Lizzie boldly, though she had turned very pale. 'I cannot break my promise to my father, for any consideration, not even to save my reputation.'

'Lizzie,' whispered the planter presently, 'promise me at least to send the child away. Let *me* send it away for you. You don't know *what* people are saying about you. Even De Courcelles has heard the rumour, and came to me for an explanation of it. I will ask you no questions, my dear, but let me help you in the matter by sending the infant to one of the sister islands. I cannot bear to think that

any one should dare to say a word against you, for your father's sake.'

'You are very kind, Mr Courtney, but I have made up my mind on this subject, and the child will remain with me. Sending her away now to the care of a hireling, will not remove the stain her presence here has cast upon my character ; and I have reasons for wishing to bring her up myself. If you object to it, I will relieve you of the burden of both of us ; but that infant is my father's last charge to me, and I will keep it.'

'If you would only trust *me* with the secret of its birth, I could fight your battle with you,' said Mr Courtney sadly.

'I will trust no one, sir. I have lost all that I cared for in this world, through it's means, and I will at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have remained true to myself.'

‘Very well, my dear ; good-night ; and remember I am still your friend,’ replied the planter, as he walked slowly away.

Lizzie looked after him for a moment, and then returning to the apartment, and regardless of the presence of Hugh Norris, she flung herself into a chair, and burst into a flood of tears.

‘*Still my friend !*’ she repeated. ‘Yes, but a friend without any trust or confidence left in me. Ah ! what is the use of his assurances ? I can read his heart too well ! I have not a friend left in the world.’





CHAPTER II.

AS she said the words, Captain Norris sprang towards her.

‘Not a friend left in the world, Liz! Oh! how can you say such a cruel thing whilst I am here?’

She could not answer him immediately for weeping, but she stretched forth her hand and laid it on his arm.

‘Forgive me, Captain Norris. I know that you are my friend, but grief makes us all selfish. Yet that they should think such a thing of me,—that even Mr

Courtney, who has known me from a little child, should suspect me of so unworthy an action, it is bitterly, *bitterly* hard.'

'You are speaking in riddles to me, Lizzie! Of *what* do they suspect you? Surely of nothing of which you need be ashamed? If so, they must answer to *me* for it. Your dead father honoured me with his friendship, and no one shall insult his daughter whilst I am able to prevent it.'

'I should have known that I might count upon your championship, Captain Norris; but it is useless. I have entangled myself in a net from which I see no prospect of freedom. You must leave me to bear the consequences by myself.'

'I shall do no such thing!' replied the Captain warmly. 'What is the worth of

friendship if it cannot stand by you in the time of need? Confide in me, Lizzie. Tell me your trouble, and let us devise a way out of it together.'

'We cannot do that,' replied Lizzie mournfully; 'but you shall hear it, all the same. If I did not tell you, San Diego would soon do so. All the hands are talking of it by this time. Even that yellow girl in the verandah is ready to believe me to have fallen to a level with herself.'

'You alarm me!' exclaimed Hugh Norris. 'What is it they dare to say of you?'

'That that child is mine!'

'*What* child? I did not know there was a child here.'

'You are the last to hear of it then,' replied Lizzie bitterly. 'The smallest lad on the plantation has discussed it

before now. I mean the infant which Rosa has in her arms. It is *not* mine! I hope you will believe me when I say so. But I have no means of proving the truth of what I say.'

'You surprise me beyond measure,' said Captain Norris. 'In what does the difficulty lie, and why cannot you appeal to the real parents to help you out of it?'

'Captain Norris, you must not question me too closely, lest I should betray a secret I have sworn to keep. Be satisfied with what I tell you. It was only yesterday my father gave me that child to nurse for him. He asked me to keep it through the night, and in the morning he would get a proper person to take charge of it. You have heard the sequel. By the morning, God had called him away, and I am left with this burden on my hands for ever!'

‘But, Lizzie, forgive me if I do not follow you. What reason is there for your keeping the child? What interest had your father in it? Why should you not send it to the people he intended to entrust it to?’

‘Perhaps I might have done so if this suspicion had not fallen upon me; but *now*, what would be the use of it? Absent or present, the child will be regarded as mine. I shall have to bear the stigma; I may as well have the satisfaction of knowing I have fulfilled my dead father’s wishes.’

‘Do you know who are the parents of the child?’

Lizzie was silent.

‘I see that you do. Surely they will never permit you innocently to bear this awful shame?’

‘Captain Norris, when my father first

showed me that child, he extracted a solemn oath from me never to reveal anything I knew or might guess concerning it. It is useless your questioning me. My tongue is tied, and whatever my silence may cost me, I am bound to endure.'

'But surely your lover, De Courcelles, does not believe this slanderous lie about you, Lizzie? *He* will stand up in your defence, whatever the world may say, and fight it with you?'

'Oh, don't talk of him! Don't mention his name!' cried Lizzie, with a sudden burst of grief. 'He *does* believe it, Captain Norris, and he has cast me off. We are parted for ever. Our engagement is at an end.'

'The cur!' exclaimed Norris contemptuously.

'You shall not call him so! What else

could he do?' rejoined Lizzie hastily. 'What would *you* do, if the woman you had engaged yourself to marry, proved to be a wanton? You would say she was not fit to be your wife, and you would be right. Until this stigma is lifted off me, I am not fit to become the wife of any honest man.'

'But it does not rest upon you, in *my* estimation,' replied her companion. 'I do not believe it; no one should ever make me do so except yourself. I would take your word against that of a thousand witnesses, Lizzie.'

'Thank you, thank you!' she exclaimed, reddening with pleasure at the sound of his honest voice. 'You are indeed a friend in the time of need. But Monsieur de Courcelles thinks otherwise. He has told me to my face that unless I will divulge the names of the parents of this

child, everything between us must be at an end. And so it is at an end. I cannot break my word to the dead. Besides—there are other reasons why I should be true to my trust.’

‘You will at least tell me one thing, Lizzie. You know to whom this child belongs, do you not? I ask it in your own interests.’

‘I do.’

‘Then go to them, my dear, and tell them the dilemma in which the promise you have given on their account has placed you. Ask them to release you from it. Surely no one could be so inhuman as to desire their shame (for I presume shame is at the bottom of this mystery) to spoil the life of an innocent woman? Oh! if I only knew their names myself, I would proclaim them far and wide, until I forced

them to release you from this cruel bondage.'

'It is *impossible*, Captain Norris!'

'Impossible for you to go to them?'

'Impossible that my going could do any good in the matter. I cannot rid myself of the blame, without shifting it on the shoulders of another, and that my oath forbids me to do. Pray leave me, Captain Norris. Leave me to bear it as best I may—*alone*! You heard what Mr Courtney has kindly proposed,—that I shall live on here, and continue my dear father's work. I mean to do so, and if God spares the child, it shall live with me. The coloured people will not despise us. They have too many of such cases amongst themselves, and for the rest, I am strong enough to suffer without sinking under it.'

'But not *alone*, dear Lizzie!' exclaimed

Hugh Norris, taking her hand. ‘If your engagement to Monsieur de Courcelles is indeed broken off, let me speak again. You would not listen to me last week on *his* account; listen to me now on your own. Come to me, and let me fight the battle of life for all three of us—you and me and the child. If it were *really* your child, Lizzie, I should say the same. When I told you I loved you, I did not mean that I loved some ideal creature raised from my own imagination, but *you*—yourself, with all your faults (if you have faults) and follies (which cannot be greater than my own), and am willing to condone everything, for the privilege of loving you. Let me try to make you forget this sorrow. In England, amidst new scenes and new friends, you may learn to feel differently, even towards me, and look back on San Diego as a

bad dream, that has passed away for ever.'

Lizzie pressed his hand gratefully.

'How good you are to me,' she answered, 'and how true! I am sure you will make the best and most loving of husbands, and some woman will be very happy with you. But that woman will not be *me*! I would not wrong you, my dear friend, by accepting your generous proposal. Why should I cast this shadow over your honourable life, or profess to offer you a heart not worthy your acceptance? I love Henri de Courcelles! Ah! don't shrink from me. I know he is unworthy and unjust, nor can I believe he has ever really cared for me; but he managed to win my love, and I cannot take it back from him so suddenly. By-and-by, perhaps, when this wound is somewhat healed,

and time has enabled me to see more clearly, I shall be strong enough to shake off the fascination that enthralls me; but just now, I can only weep over its decay, as I weep over the grave of my lost father. And so you see how utterly unworthy I am of the noble offer you have made me.'

'Not in *my* eyes,' persisted Hugh Norris. 'I can never think of you but as the dearest and most self-sacrificing of women, and I shall keep the place in my heart open for you to my life's end. But I will worry you no further now. Only say if I can do anything for you, Lizzie, before I go.'

'Nothing,' she sighed. 'Unless it be to come to see me again, and comfort me as you have done to-day.'

His face brightened with pleasure at her proposal, and he acceded to it joyfully.

‘I will come up to-morrow if it will not be too soon,’ he answered. ‘I have not landed my coolies yet, and the *Trevelyan* may be in port for some weeks yet.’

‘How is that?’ demanded Lizzie.

‘On account of this fever, and also of the town riots. My consignee is afraid of both moral and physical infection. There was an attack planned on Government House last night, and only just discovered in time. The rebels had laid a train of gunpowder right under the state rooms. There would have been a fearful sacrifice of life had they succeeded.’

‘How terrible! Were they caught?’

‘Unfortunately they were not, for they got off to the Alligator Swamp as soon as the alarm was given. And no one dares follow them there: the danger is

too great. They are watching outside it, however, and as soon as they come out, they will be killed or arrested.'

'Poor creatures,' said Liz, with a shudder, 'they will not be able to hold out long. Twelve hours in the Alligator Swamp is said to be certain death. It's poisonous atmosphere kills all those who escape the alligators. It is too fearful to think of.'

'Yes, I fancy the poor devils will be forced to surrender, and they will get no quarter from the Governor, Sir Russell Johnstone. He is in a great state of alarm about himself, and resolved to stamp the insurrection out at any cost.'

'One cannot blame him. It is a case in which the few must suffer for the many. Is the Governor a nice man, Captain Norris?'

‘So - so. A very ordinary - looking Englishman,—more fit to till his own acres, I should imagine, than to govern a colony. He has certainly done little as yet to quell the ill-feeling in San Diego, which seems to be increasing every day. But I shall not be able to keep my coolies on board much longer. There are six hundred of them, and I shall not be sorry when their backs are turned. I have had enough of their company on the way from Calcutta.’

‘But they will make a bad exchange, I expect, from the hold of the *Trevelyan* to the cotton and sugar plantations. I have heard poor father say you spoil your coolies, Captain Norris, and make them quite dissatisfied with their reception in the West Indies.’

‘Oh, that’s a libel!’ cried the young man, smiling. ‘I may have tried to make

their life aboard ship as little irksome as possible, but it has gone no further. But I am afraid they are mostly shipped under false pretences, and led to expect less work and more pay than they are ever likely to get in these islands. Their existence, at the best, is hardly worth living.'

'You are right there, and no one who has dwelt amongst them, as I have, could fail to sympathise with their troubles. They have much to bear, and little to compensate them for it. And with all their faults, they are a patient people, although very impulsive. That poor girl in the verandah did me a bad turn this morning, but she is ready to break her heart about it now.'

'Ah, Missy Liz, I'se *so* sorry!' cried Rosa, who had overheard the words that concerned herself.

‘But you can’t undo the mischief, you see, Rosa, so try and make up for it by being a faithful servant to your mistress now,’ said Hugh Norris, as he passed over the threshold on his way home.

The yellow girl did not take correction from a stranger very well. She shrugged her shoulders, and pulled a face after the retreating form of Captain Norris, as she entered the bungalow with her infant charge.

‘What business of that Massa Norris to speak me?’ she inquired, pouting. ‘If he want to scold some one, he’d better go and find dat coolie girl Judy, what took the baby first. She’s a berry bad girl—rude and impident—with a tongue as long as an alligator’s.’

‘Do you mean Mammy Lila’s granddaughter?’ inquired Lizzie. ‘When did you see her, Rosa?’

‘Oh! she’s big enough to be seen, Missy Liz, and she’s just as cunning as they’re made. Judy has left Shanty Hill now, and come to live alongside of her own people, and dis morning Massa Courcelles has given her work on the plantation. And dat gal’s tongue—how it *do* run!’

‘About *me*, I suppose?’ said Liz bitterly.

‘Yes, Missy Liz—that’s just it—about you. Judy tells every one how you went up to Shanty Hill in the middle of the night wid dis poor little baby in your arms, and how you was so ill and weak you nearly tumbled down on de floor; and Mammy Lila took de baby, and you tell her, “*Silence and secrecy*,” which means, “Don’t tell nuffin to nobody on your life.”’

‘And every one believes it was my

own baby I took to Mammy Lila, Rosa, the same as you did?’

‘What *can* they believe, Missy Liz? I didn’t know what to believe myself. Dere’s not too many quite white babies knocking about de island, you know, and dis little one has no coloured blood in it. Dat’s plain to be seen. And dat Judy is so impident. She’d say anything. She says she skeered you so when she brought the baby back agin when Mammy Lila died, dat you nearly fainted, and it was de shock and de trouble that has killed de poor Doctor right away.’

‘Well, well, Rosa, don’t speak of it any more at present. It turns my heart sick to hear it. Take the infant into my room, and put it to bed. Judy’s talk, however untrue, can do me no further harm; and you mustn’t forget,

whilst judging her, that you thought and said pretty much the same yourself.'

'Ah, yes, Missy Liz; but den I'se berry sorry, and I'll be a good gal to you now,' replied Rosa, with the nigger's ready excuse for anything they may have done wrong.

'And I believe you, so let the matter rest,' said Lizzie, as the yellow girl disappeared with the baby, and she sat down at the table, resting her head upon her hand.

What a difference twenty-four hours had made in her life! Twenty-four hours ago she had possessed a father who loved her, a lover who respected her, friends who believed in her, a good name and a spotless reputation. Now, she seemed to have lost everything at one fell blow. Her father was gone, her lover lost, her friends stood afar off. She was publicly

spoken of as an unmarried mother, and Maraquita's sin was laid at her door. And she had no means of repudiating the scandal. Nothing but her bare word stood between her reputation and the world. Who would believe her? What woman would *not* deny such a crushing shame?

Her solemn oath to her father, the fathomless obligation under which they stood to Mr Courtney, the awful consequences to their benefactor which must follow a revelation of the truth, stared Lizzie in the face, like giant obstacles that forbid her even attempting to surmount them. What would she and her dead father have been but for the generosity extended to them through life by the planter's hand?

He, a felon and a convict, and *she*, the daughter of a disgraced and dis-

honoured man, pointed at by the finger of scorn, shunned by the community of the virtuous and honest, a pariah and an outcast amongst men. No wonder her father had exacted her silence and obedience at the price of her salvation.

But would Maraquita be so untrue to all the instincts of honour and justice as to permit her adopted sister to continue to bear the shame which rightly belonged to herself? Liz remembered Hugh Norris's advice to her to seek out the parents of the child, and beg them to clear her good name in the eyes of the world. The counsel was good. She only knew of Quita as the mother of the infant; but she could, at all events, secure an interview with her, and implore her to confess the truth to Mr and Mrs Courtney, and relieve her from so intolerable a burthen. Surely, thought Lizzie, if Quita knew what

she was suffering—and likely to suffer—she could not have the heart to refuse her! Little Quita, whom she had held in her arms as a baby herself—who had learned to walk clinging to her hand—who had shared her girlish pleasures and sorrows with her, and told her all her secrets (except this last terrible one)—surely *Quita* would never blast her whole future in order to shield herself from the consequences of her sin!

Perhaps she did not know about Henri de Courcelles! Liz had loved this man too deeply to talk upon the subject; and as the engagement had never been publicly ratified, Quita might not be aware of the cruel separation her guilt had caused between them. If she knew *that*—if she were told that some one whom Liz loved as fondly as ever *she* could have loved the father of her child

must be given up for ever, unless she spoke out—surely she would muster up courage to remove the heavy load she had laid upon her childhood's friend.

As Lizzie arrived at this conclusion, she lifted up her head and breathed more freely. A light was breaking through her darkness. Perhaps, after all, she had condemned her adopted sister too hastily, and should have waited to see her before she passed judgment. The time had been too short, and events had been too hurried, to enable Maraquita to do her justice. Perhaps she was even ignorant of the blame cast upon her; and with this last charitable thought of her adopted sister, and a resolution to see her on the first opportunity, Lizzie sought her bed, and tried to compose herself to sleep.





CHAPTER III.

MARAQUITA was lying in her silken hammock, swinging under the orange trees, and thinking over the events of the last few days. They had been important ones for her. The unexpected death of the Doctor had frightened her beyond measure, and more than ever did she feel that Henri de Courcelles owed it to her to make every exertion in his power to remove the proof of her shame from San Diego. Until that was done, she should have

no rest. But she was very undecided about Sir Russell Johnstone. She didn't wish to marry him—all her heart (such as it was) was set on Henri de Courcelles—but yet she wanted to be the wife of the Governor of San Diego, and certain hints from her mother had shown her it would be the best, and perhaps the only way, to get out of the scrape she was in. And if she refused Sir Russell Johnstone, it would be all the same; her parents would never consent to her marrying Monsieur de Courcelles.

Maraquita tossed to and fro as she thought over these things, and made the hammock swing as far as its cords would admit, till the orange blossoms and their glossy leaves swept across her face, and old Jessica, who was watching from below as usual, called out to her young mistress to take care. Quita was

trying to argue the matter out with herself (as silly people will) so as to make the pieces of the puzzle fit each other and please everybody all round, being too blind or too selfish, meanwhile, to see that the only person she was really bent on pleasing was herself. She believed that in a very few days she would be called upon to decide the matter, for her mother had received a letter from the Governor to ask if her daughter had returned to the White House, but she was hardly prepared, as she lay there that morning, to see Sir Russell's barouche, with its pair of English horses, and its outriders, dash up the drive, and stop before the portals of her home. She flushed so rosy at the sight, that Jessica observed her emotion.

‘Dat only de Governor, missy, come to see Massa Courtney. De Governor’s

a fine gennelman, isn't he, missy? Got beautiful coat and trousers and waistcoat on, and fine whiskers, and nice red face. Dat Government House a beautiful place, too, and dat carriage lovely. I'd like to see my missy in a carriage like dat, wid fine English horses, and coachman, and all.'

'What nonsense you are talking, Jessica,' said Quita querulously, as she turned her head away. 'Papa's carriage is quite good enough for me, and I don't want any other.'

'Ah, but some day my missy marry fine gennelman, and have everyting dat's nice and beautiful. Not one of dese island fellers—overseers and such like,' continued the negress contemptuously, 'with half de blood black in their veins, but a real English gennelman, with plenty money, and all white blood.'

Maraquita reddened, and yawned, and turned pettishly away. She knew well enough to whom old Jessica was alluding, and she resented the hint as an impertinence.

Meanwhile Sir Russell Johnstone had rushed into the presence of Mr and Mrs Courtney.

‘Fancy, my dear sir,’ he was exclaiming, ‘that yesterday the police actually discovered a train of gunpowder laid right under the banqueting - room of Government House! Had it not been for their vigilance, at the next dinner-party I gave, we might all have been blown up—I, you, your wife, even your lovely daughter. It is too horrible a catastrophe to contemplate!’

‘Horrible indeed!’ echoed his host. ‘But are you sure that all is now safe? Has a thorough search been made?’

‘They tell me so, and that I need have no further alarm. But it has shaken my nerves, I can tell you that. And the delinquents are not caught either, though the native police are on the alert.’

‘How is that?’

‘They have escaped to the Alligator Swamp; though why they can’t pursue them there, beats me altogether.’

‘Ah, my dear Sir Russell,’ cried Mr Courtney, ‘you don’t know what the Alligator Swamp is like, or you would not be surprised. Even a negro will not venture to enter it, unless he is in fear of his life. It is a regular morass of green slime. It is impossible to tell at each step you take whether you will sink to the bottom of it or not; and it is infested with alligators or caymen of the largest and most ferocious breed. No living creatures but the caymen could

breathe such an atmosphere ; for the green swamp raises poisonous fungi, the vapours alone of which are almost certain death. These wretches who have plotted against your life cannot possibly escape punishment. If they do not fall into the hands of the police, they will certainly die, the victims of the pestilential atmosphere of the Alligator Swamp.'

'I am glad to hear it,' replied the Governor, who was a short, stout man of ordinary appearance, and with rather a round and rosy face, 'for I don't consider my appointment worth the risk of being blown up. The island seems to me to be in a regular state of rebellion, and I don't like it. If any more plots against my safety are discovered, I shall resign, and return to England. Her Majesty would be the last person to wish

me to remain if there is the slightest fear of danger.'

'Oh, there must not be—there *shall* not be!' exclaimed Mrs Courtney pathetically, as the pictures of a retreating Governor and a lost son-in-law floated before her mental vision. 'These wretches must be brought to judgment, and executed. I would have them all hanged, if I were you, Sir Russell. The idea of their attempting such an outrage! Hanging would be too good for them.'

'I am not sure if I *can* hang them; but, if so, you may be sure I will,' rejoined the Governor. 'Why, it makes a man quite nervous of going to his bed. It's absurd—ridiculous—an insult to the British Government!'

'It must be stamped out at any cost,' said Mr Courtney; 'and until it is—until things are more settled—if you would like

to vacate Government House for a little while, and would accept the hospitality of Beauregard, Sir Russell, why, all I can say is, that everything I possess (humble as it may be) is at your service.'

'But wouldn't they say I had run away?' replied the Governor. 'I should like it above all things, but the papers have been rather spiteful about me of late, and I am afraid they would declare I had shown the white feather.'

'But you must think of your own safety—*that* is the first consideration, surely!' exclaimed Mrs Courtney. 'And you must think of others too, Sir Russell,—of those who care for you. My poor Maraquita will be in a fever of anxiety as soon as she hears this news.'

She had begun to be afraid that his own peril had somewhat displaced Maraquita from the Governor's thoughts,

and the idea that he might even be frightened out of San Diego without fulfilling his promise, filled her with alarm. She determined that if possible the engagement should be ratified at once, and then, if anything further happened to frighten Sir Russell back to England, he would be compelled to take his wife with him. Her *ruse* had the desired effect, and the mention of her daughter turned the Governor's thoughts in another direction.

‘Ah, the beautiful Miss Courtney. Pray don't think that I have forgotten her, in the exercise of my functions. To quell this native rebellion is the first duty I owe to my Queen and country, but my heart has been at the White House, my dear madam, all the time. How is your sweet daughter? Have you told her of my proposal?’

Is it possible I may have the great pleasure of seeing her?’

Mrs Courtney was not quite sure what to answer. She glanced at her husband, but he was standing with his back to her, and would make no sign, so she was thrown upon her own resources. Yet she was a woman, and when it is a matter of *finesse*, when do a woman’s resources fail?

‘She is better, dear Sir Russell—much better, almost well, in fact, but still weak, and unequal to any exertion. I *did* try to approach the subject of your most flattering proposal to her on her return home, but her agitation became so great, I was forced to relinquish it. You must not condemn her weakness. The prospect is a very dazzling one to a simple and innocent girl like our Maraquita.’

‘Do you mean to tell me, then, that she is favourably disposed towards me?’ inquired the Governor excitedly.

It is true that he was a Governor, and would perhaps have been somewhat surprised at any woman in San Diego refusing his suit. But at the same time he was fifty years of age, stout, bald, and past the age of romance, and it was enough to make any such man excited, to hear that a pure and lovely girl of eighteen was ready and eager to fly into his arms. He was quite aware of the value of the position he had to offer to the planter’s daughter, but he was conceited enough to be gulled into the belief that she could actually fall in love with him, more than with the advantages which a marriage with him would entail. His rosy face became rubicund with expectant plea-

sure, and he already saw himself with the most beautiful woman in San Diego folded in his embrace.

‘*Favourably disposed!*’ echoed Mrs Courtney. ‘My dear Sir Russell, that is not the word! Maraquita is overpowered by the preference you have shown towards her, only too shy to offer you her timid girlish love in return. She is so afraid she can give you nothing worth the having in exchange for your noble proposal to make her your wife.’

‘If she will give me *herself*, it is all I ask,’ returned the Governor. ‘And now, tell me, may I see her, and plead my cause in person?’

‘Oh, Sir Russell, one moment!’ cried Mrs Courtney, hurriedly. ‘Let Mr Courtney offer you some refreshment, whilst I prepare our sweet girl for your

visit. You do not know how shy and sensitive she is. The very mention of marriage makes her blush. Let me go to my child, and when she is calm enough to receive you, I will return and tell you so.'

'As you please, my dear madam, but don't try my patience too far. Mr Courtney and I will have a cigar together, and talk over our plans for the future, whilst you are gone.' And with a courtly bow to his hostess, Sir Russell let her leave the room.

Mrs Courtney hastened at once to Maraquita's side. *Hastened* is not exactly the word for the ungraceful waddle which she used when she wished to expedite her footsteps, but she walked as fast as her unwieldy form would permit her, to the shady spot where Quita's hammock swung under the

orange trees, and having dismissed Jessica to the house, she entered at once upon her subject.

‘Quita, my darling, Sir Russell Johnstone has come for your answer to his proposal.’

She was clever in her own way, this half-educated, half-bred Spanish woman. She knew that if she gave Quita time to reflect, she would probably think of a way out of the dilemma in which she found herself, or consult her lover, and be persuaded perhaps to elope with him, and ruin her prospects for ever. She had read enough of her daughter’s mind on the first day she returned home, to see that all her inclinations were opposed to marrying Sir Russell Johnstone, and if she were persuaded to consent to it, it must be through *finesse*, or an appeal to her ambition. What

Mrs Courtney wanted now, was to hurry Maraquita into accepting the Governor's proposal, and make her so far commit herself that she could not back out of it afterwards. And she had good materials to work upon, for Maraquita was a youthful copy of her mother, as vain, and selfish, and indolent, and heartless, and as fond of luxuries and the good things of this life. But she was considerably startled at hearing she had to make up her mind so soon, and her large dark eyes—so like those of a deer—opened wide with consternation and alarm.

‘Oh, mother! Surely I need not give him an answer to-day. It is so very soon. I have had no time to think about it.’

‘*No time to think about it!*’ echoed Mrs Courtney; ‘why, the case is plain enough. What thinking does it require? Sir

Russell offers to make you Lady Johnstone, and the mistress of Government House. He has an income of many thousands a year, and your father will settle a handsome dowry on you if you marry him. You will be the richest woman, and the woman of highest rank, in San Diego, and every soul in the island will exclaim at your good fortune. What more, in the name of Heaven, do you want, Maraquita?’

‘I am so afraid I sha’n’t love him,’ sighed the girl, with a last remnant of womanly feeling.

‘Very well,’ exclaimed Mrs Courtney, turning her back upon her daughter, and professing to be about to leave her, ‘I will go and tell Sir Russell, and at once! He is waiting your answer, and I can’t keep a Governor on tenterhooks for hours. If you refuse him, he says he is going

back to England by the next steamer, and shall never return here, as he is sick of San Diego, and will only stay on condition you become his wife. But as you won't try to love him, it is of no use.'

'Stay, mother, stay!' cried Quita hurriedly; 'don't go just yet. Wait one moment, and speak to me. Is it *really* true that Sir Russell will leave San Diego if I don't marry him?'

'Didn't I say so, Maraquita. He declares that nothing shall make him stay; and if he returns, it will be with a Lady Johnstone to preside over Government House for him. He will marry an English girl, and you will have the mortification of seeing some woman, with half your beauty, enjoying all the advantages you have been fool enough to refuse. Quita, I have no patience with you.'

'But, mamma—mamma, I haven't re-

fused him. I don't *mean* to refuse him! If (as you say) I must make up my mind at once, I *have* made it up! I accept Sir Russell's proposal, and you can go and tell him so.'

'Oh, my darling girl!' exclaimed Mrs Courtney effusively, 'I was sure you would see this grand prospect in its proper light at last. How proud and delighted your father will be to hear your decision. But you must give Sir Russell his answer in person, my love. You must let me bring him here, and tell him yourself that you will be his wife.'

'But I am not fit to see any one. I am so untidy!' cried Quita, jumping out of her hammock, and standing before her mother.

She was clothed in a long loose robe, of saffron colour, with hanging sleeves, that showed her white arms, and a belt that spanned her slender waist. Her dusky

hair lay in a rippling mass upon her shoulders, and her fair face was flushed with excitement, and perhaps regret. She had never looked more lovely in her life, and Mrs Courtney regarded her with pardonable pride and admiration.

‘You are charming, my dear! I will not have you wait to make a single alteration in your dress; and Sir Russell is so impatient, that he will readily pardon the negligence of your morning attire. He knows you have been ill, and are disinclined for much exertion. Sit down in this chair, Quita, and I will bring him to you in another minute. Oh, my dear child,’ concluded Mrs Courtney, with a close embrace, ‘how thankful I am that all is about to end so happily for you! You have half killed me by your thoughtlessness and imprudence.’

There were genuine tears in her mother’s

eyes as she pronounced the words, and Quita felt for the first time, perhaps, what a terrible risk she had run.

‘Never mind, mamma!’ she whispered, ‘it is over now, and *he*—he has promised me that I shall never hear anything more about it. Let us try and forget it ever occurred.’

‘Yes, my dearest girl, that is just what you must do. Blot out the past, like a hideous dream. It has been a terrible experience for you, and so long as you remained unmarried, I should always have trembled for your safety. But now—as the wife of the Governor, my dear child’s future is assured, and we will never mention the hateful subject again—not even to each other.’

‘No! and, mamma, you told me the other day that (excepting for certain reasons) you would have had some changes made on the plantation. Couldn’t you

manage to have those changes made now. Not too suddenly, you know, so as to excite suspicion, but as if they were brought about in the natural course of events. Can't you persuade papa,' said Maraquita, hiding her face in her mother's bosom, 'to engage a—a—new overseer? It would be better for all of us.'

'You are quite right, my darling,' whispered Mrs Courtney back again, 'and I am glad you have so much sense. Trust me, dear, that you shall not be annoyed in this matter. As soon as your marriage is settled, I will take you up on the hill range for change of air, and before you return we will have done what you suggest. I have a dozen good reasons to give your father for engaging some one else in that person's place.'

'Don't be harsh with him,' faltered Maraquita; 'remember that—that—'

But this was a dangerous topic, on which Mrs Courtney did not choose to dilate.

‘I can remember nothing now, my dear, except that Sir Russell is waiting for your answer, and that I must go and fetch him to you. Now, be a woman, Maraquita! Think of all you owe to yourself, and the brilliant future that lies before you! I really believe I should go out of my mind with grief if anything happened to prevent it.’

Mrs Courtney walked back to the house as quickly as she was able, and Maraquita lay in the bamboo chair, with her eyes closed, and the unshed tears trembling like dewdrops on her long dark lashes. She had not to wait long! In another minute her mother had returned, in company with the Governor, and Quita had to disperse the vision of her hand-

some Spanish lover, with his graceful form and romantic bearing, and open her eyes upon a stout and pursy little Englishman, with a bald head and uninteresting features, and legs too short for his body.

But there was no mistaking the expression of his beaming face, and the girl saw at a glance that the matter had been concluded for her, and she was already in his eyes the future Lady Johnstone.

‘My dear Miss Courtney—may I not say my dear Maraquita?’ he commenced, ‘I cannot tell you how flattered I feel by your kind acceptance of my offer, nor how much I hope it will be the forerunner of our life-long happiness.’

He raised the hand she extended, to his lips as he spoke, and she felt compelled to reply, in a faltering voice,—

‘I hope it will—’

‘I won’t hear of any doubts about it,’ exclaimed Mrs Courtney triumphantly. ‘I feel *sure*, Sir Russell, that my sweet child’s happiness is safe in your hands ; and as for yours—why, if the affection and duty of a simple and innocent girl can secure it, it will be as safe as her own. You must not forget, my dear sir, that you have chosen to honour a very young girl—almost a child—with your preference, and will, I know, make allowance for any faults that may arise from ignorance of the world and of society.’

‘I know that I have chosen the loveliest and sweetest girl in San Diego!’ cried the Governor enthusiastically, ‘and that it will be the aim of my life to surround her with every luxury and pleasure that I can afford ; and as for her faults, I shall never see any to make allowance for.’

‘Oh, Sir Russell,’ replied Mrs Courtney, in the same strain, ‘you must not spoil my child! I know myself that her chief fault is that which will mend every day; still she is *very* young—there is no denying that—and will often need a little kindly counsel as to how she should act in her high position.’

‘She will only need to be herself, and to act on her own impulses, to make the most charming hostess that ever presided at the Government House. But we have not yet spoken of when the marriage is to take place, Mrs Courtney,—and I hope you will persuade Maraquita not to keep me waiting too long.’

‘You are very impatient,’ she replied, smiling, ‘but you must not forget that my dear child has been ill, and is still very weak and fragile. Still, if you make a point of it, I am sure neither Mr Court-

ney nor myself will stand in the way of a speedy wedding.'

'But what will Miss Maraquita say?' demanded the Governor, bending over her.

'My mother can decide for me,' she murmured faintly. 'I have never disobeyed you yet, mamma, have I?'

'Never! my dear, never! You have been the best and most dutiful of daughters, and deferred to your parents' wishes in all things—'

But here the remembrance of certain late events put a sudden stop to Mrs Courtney's eloquence, and she watched the crimson blood that rose to Quita's cheek, in alarm. The girl was still weak: it was dangerous to provoke an emotion which she might find it impossible to quell.

'But I think we have discussed this

exciting topic sufficiently for to-day,' she continued. 'Maraquita is easily upset, and I should be sorry to see her thrown back again. Will you settle the knotty question of the wedding day with me, Sir Russell, after you have finished talking to my daughter? I don't fancy you will find there are many difficulties in the way — but we must think first of Maraquita's strength, and how we can restore it for the important occasion.'

'Certainly! that is the chief consideration,' replied Sir Russell; 'what do you propose to do about it?'

'I was thinking of taking her up to the hill range for a week, to escape these enervating land breezes. I think a little change would do her more good than anything else.'

'The very thing!' exclaimed Sir Russell,

‘and you can have the use of the Government Bungalow, and all that is in it. When will you start? To-morrow? If so, I will send word at once to have everything in readiness for your reception. Don’t trouble yourself about taking your carriage and horses, mine will be there, and at your entire disposal. And I trust that after the rest of a day or two, Maraquita will permit me to join your party, and accompany her on her excursions in search of health. I have an Arab pony that carries a lady to perfection, and, with your leave, I will send it up for her use. What does my *fiancée* say? Does my proposal meet with her approval?’

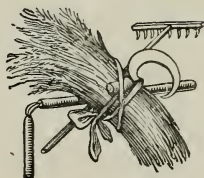
‘She would be a very ungrateful girl, and very hard to please, if it did not,’ said her mother, answering for her; and then perceiving that Quita’s self-command was almost at an end, and that she was

on the point of breaking down, she added playfully,—

‘And now I am going to be hard-hearted and carry you off, Sir Russell, for my poor child is overcome with all this excitement, and unable to bear any more at present. Please be good, and return with me to the White House; and if you will call upon us again this evening, I have no doubt she will be calmer, and better able to thank you for all your kind offers on her behalf.’

The Governor rose at once (for he was a gentleman, although he was ugly and ill-formed), and took his leave. As he did so, he stooped down and kissed Maraquita on the cheek. It was not an out-of-the-way thing for a newly-accepted lover to do, but the salute, quietly as it was given, seemed to sting her. She did not resent it whilst her mother and

Sir Russell Johnstone were in sight, but as soon as the doors of the White House had closed upon them, she hid her face in her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.





CHAPTER IV.

SHE was still weeping quietly, when the branches of the orange tree which formed a leafy bower around her, were parted, and a voice exclaimed, with passionate intensity,—

‘Maraquita!’

The girl sprang to her feet without any effort to conceal her tears. Henri de Courcelles stood beside her.

‘Oh, go!’ she implored, ‘go at once. You don’t know the risk you are running.’

My mother suspects us, and she may be back in another moment. For *my* sake, Henri, go.'

'Not unless you will tell me the cause of your grief. Is it because this burden is too heavy for you? If so, come with me, and let us share it, and fight the world together.'

'I cannot talk with you about it now, Henri,' replied Maraquita, with a look of alarm; 'it is impossible. You *must* leave me. I see Jessica coming from the house.'

'Then where will you meet me, for I shall not rest until you have satisfied my curiosity; besides, I have important news for you about—it.'

This intelligence made Quita change her mind. She was intensely anxious to have the assurance of her own complete safety, and she could be cunning

enough where her inclinations were concerned.

‘Have you done—what I asked you?’ she gasped.

‘I have made everything right, but I cannot explain the matter to you in a moment, nor where there is any fear of our being overheard.’

‘Wait for me in the oleander thicket, then,’ cried Maraquita. ‘I will be there in five minutes.’

Henri de Courcelles nodded acquiescence, and disappeared as old Jessica came up to her young mistress.

‘Missus Courtney send me to ask if my missy like to have someting to eat and drink now ; and will missy come back to de house, or will she have it brought out here under de trees?’ asked the negress.

‘Neither, Jessica. Tell mamma I am not hungry or thirsty, only very sleepy,

and I want to be left alone for an hour or two. I can call you when I wake.'

'If missy sleepy, better come and sleep in house,' urged Jessica. 'So many flies and 'skeeters about here.'

'I wish you would let me do as I like, Jessica,' said Quita, 'and keep your suggestions to yourself.'

'I'se very sorry, missy. I won't say any more, only stop here and keep off de flies and tings from your face.'

'You're enough to drive a saint mad!' cried Maraquita, stamping her foot. 'Didn't I tell you I wanted to be left alone? What is it to you if I like flies and mosquitoes buzzing about me? Go back to the house, and don't come near me again till I give you leave.'

The old nurse obeyed without a murmur; but she *did* murmur, for all that. The coloured people are very secretive,

and can assume an appearance of complete innocence, all the time they are cognisant of their employer's most important secrets.

‘Ah! my poor little missy,’ muttered Jessica to herself, as she shambled on her bare flat feet towards the house, ‘you think ole black nurse blind, but she see too well. She know all about de baby at Doctor’s bungalow, and who’s de fader and moder of it, as well as you. And she will see her little missy revenged, before many moons is ober her head, into de bargain. Cuss dat oberseer!’

Meanwhile Maraquita, having watched Jessica into the house, through the branches of the orange tree, stole out the opposite side, and, keeping well out of view of the windows, took her way towards the oleander thicket, which lay between her home and De Courcelles’

bungalow. It was a wild patch of flowering shrubs, densely planted together, and forming a sufficient ambush to conceal any number of persons from the public gaze. There was a wooden bench in one part of it, where Maraquita and De Courcelles had often held their moonlight trysts together; and there she found him eager to tell his news, and claim his reward.

Quita sunk down upon the bench, and trembled. She was not only weak from her recent illness, but she dreaded the scene which might follow the impending revelation.

‘You are far from well yet, my Quita,’ said Henri de Courcelles, as he folded his arms about her trembling form; ‘but I have something to tell you which will set your mind at rest.’

‘Tell it to me quickly, then,’ rejoined

Maraquita. 'Have you sent it out of the island? Are you *sure* I shall never hear of it again?'

'No, I cannot quite promise you that,' replied De Courcelles, with an intuitive disgust (even in the midst of his passion) for her undisguised selfishness. 'It has never been in my hands, so it was impossible I could form any plans for it. But circumstances have fallen out so fortunately, that I don't see any chance of suspicion falling upon *you*.'

'What do you mean? I don't understand you,' said Quita pettishly. 'If it is to remain in San Diego, the secret may come out any day, and my only safety will be in leaving the island.'

'Wait a moment, dearest, and listen to me. It seems that the day before the Doctor's death, he brought the child home to his bungalow, where it now is—'

‘With Lizzie? In the bungalow?’ cried Quita, turning ashy pale. ‘Oh, my God! then all is over, and I am lost!’

‘Hush! hush! Maraquita. Nothing of the sort. Liz refuses to say a word upon the subject. *I* have questioned her narrowly; so has your father; and all she will answer is that before his death Dr Fellows extracted a solemn oath from her never to disclose anything concerning the child, and that her lips are sealed.’

‘Oh, but it will come out; it is sure to come out some day!’ exclaimed Quita, weeping, as she wrung her hands in abject fear. ‘You have ruined me, Henri! You have destroyed all my future prospects! I shall be branded for ever as a dishonest woman!’

‘But it is impossible! All the plantation—I may say all San Diego—already believes the child to be Lizzie’s own.’

Maraquita stared at him in astonishment.

‘They believe *that*! But what does Lizzie say?’

‘She can say nothing! Her lips are sealed by her oath!’

‘Some day the shame may prove too hard to bear, and they will be forced open.’

‘It will be too late then to assert her innocence. The world of San Diego is quite convinced by this time that she is the mother of the infant, and her attempts to cast the blame on you will only appear to be an impudent subterfuge. She has no proof—or witness—to bring forward in confirmation of the truth.’

‘Poor Lizzie,’ said Quita, in a low voice, visions of past kindnesses on the part of her adopted sister, and of a faithful life-long affection, floated before her mind, and

made her tremble. Something—was it the last effort made by her Good Angel in her behalf—seemed to rise within her heart, and prompt her to cry out that *it must not be*, that she *could* not be guilty of this dreadful wrong, and let her just burthen lie on the shoulders of an innocent woman. But then she remembered the shame and the disgrace that would ensue to her, and how her parents would despise and reproach her, and Sir Russell Johnstone would refuse to make her his wife, and moral cowardice made her shiver and remain silent.

‘Ay! poor Lizzie,’ echoed De Courcelles. ‘I am really sorry for the girl; but what can be done? It is a choice between two evils. Either *she* must be sacrificed, or my peerless Maraquita. Do you suppose I could hesitate between them? There is one thing to be said,

however. Lizzie is not in your position. She will not feel the disgrace so keenly as you would. And, before long, Maraquita, we may be able to relieve her of her burthen.'

Maraquita did not like the last allusion.

'I don't see *how*,' she answered lamely.

'Have you forgotten, then, what you promised, when you asked me to assist you to escape the inevitable blame of the consequences of our mutual love,—that, if your parents refused to sanction our marriage, you would elope with me to Santa Lucia, and not return until we were man and wife in the eyes of the law, as we are now in the eyes of Heaven?'

'But you have *not* done as I asked you,' she replied evasively. 'I don't see that you have done anything. *It* is still here, closer at hand even than I thought it was, and (whatever you may say) liable

at any moment to be brought home to my door. And there is another danger, Henri. Mamma has discovered our secret—how, I am unable to say, but she has told me so pretty plainly, and also that she will keep it only on one condition—'

'And that is—'

'That I accept the proposals of Sir Russell Johnstone.'

'*You shall not!*' cried her lover indignantly. 'I will not stand by quietly and see the woman I consider *my wife* handed over to that bald-headed old Governor. I will go straight up to Mr Courtney sooner, and confess the truth, and ask his pardon for what I have done. Surely he would never wish you to marry another man, if he knew what has taken place between us. And if he persists in dragging you to the altar, I will tear you from your

bridegroom's arms, and stab you to the heart, before he shall claim what is mine.'

Quita's star-like eyes dilated with terror. She knew something of what the Spanish and Creole blood is capable of doing when roused, and foresaw bloodshed—perhaps murder—if Henri de Courcelles did not have his own way. And yet, to give up the brilliant prospect before her, in order to become an overseer's wife, and one whose maiden reputation would be lightly spoken of, seemed to be impossible. Why had she ever entangled her feet in a net which threatened to drag her down to a life of obloquy and shame? To what friend could she turn in her great need? Suddenly the idea flashed across her mind that she would confess everything to her mother. Mrs Courtney already

knew (or had guessed) the truth, and counselled her daughter on the best mode of escaping its results. She was very anxious to see Maraquita Lady Johnstone. If making a clean breast of her secret brought a certain amount of recrimination on her head, it would at the same time secure her an ally with whom to fight this terrible battle for a name and a position in life. For the first time hope and comfort seemed to enter her breast. If her mother were on her side, she felt she could defy Henri de Courcelles, and Liz Fellows, and the world. All their assertions would be taken as impudent lies, and only secure their own immediate banishment from Beauregard. But, meanwhile, her lover must be quieted and conciliated, and Maraquita knew how to do it full well. She had scarcely con-

ceived the notion how to act in the future, before her white arms were wreathed about his neck.

‘Henri,’ she cried, with her lips to his, ‘don’t speak to me like that! Don’t think of such a thing, for Heaven’s sake! Do you imagine that *I* would ever consent to be placed in such a position, or that any amount of tyranny would make me marry a man against my will? Let the worst come to the worst, dear; let mamma tell my father of our intrigue; it will only result in your having to leave San Diego. Whether *I* shall be able to go too, remains to be proved. I am under age, you know, and if papa chooses to lock me up, or send me to England, I suppose he can. But even *that* will be better than being forced to marry a man I don’t love; and you know that I shall always remember

you, dearest, and think of the time that is past, as the happiest portion of my life.'

Henri de Courcelles looked sullen and suspicious. The clasping arms were very sweet, and the ripe lips very tempting, but there was a false ring in Quita's speech, which made itself apparent to his senses, although his judgment could not detect it. There was no fault to be found with her words, yet they inspired him with distrust, and he felt certain that she was betraying whilst she kissed him.

'I don't know what to think of you, Maraquita,' he said presently. 'I suppose you love me, in your way, but you seem very ready to fall in with your parents' plans to get rid of me.'

'But what *could* I do, Henri, if my father was determined to separate us?

Am I not completely in his power? Our only chance appears to me to lie in secrecy, and yet you speak as if you would disclose the affair to all San Diego.'

'And if I hold my tongue and remain quiet, what then? You will marry Sir Russell Johnstone before my very eyes, and I shall have to grin and bear it.'

'We are the most unfortunate people in the world,' sighed Maraquita, with mock sentimentality.

'You mean that *I* am the most unfortunate man in the world, ever to have set my heart on a girl who doesn't care two straws for me. I can see through you now, Maraquita. You were willing enough to commit the sin, but you are too great a coward to face the consequences of it. You have deceived and disobeyed your parents over and over

again, when it suited your pleasure to do so, but when it comes to a question of marrying the man you profess to love, you take refuge behind the transparent screen of filial duty and affection. I was good enough for your lover, it appears, but I am *not* good enough to be your husband. You have higher views in prospect for yourself, and I may go anywhere,—be kicked out of my appointment, and cast homeless on San Diego—what does it signify to you, so long as you become Lady Johnstone, and have plenty to eat and drink, and a spotless reputation. But it shall not be! You have made yourself *mine*, and I refuse to give you up. If you attempt to become the wife of any other man, whether in deference to your parents' wishes, or your own, I will blast your name from north to south, till the com-

monest fellow on the island would refuse to give you his. Every black in San Diego shall know *what* you are, a light love, a false woman, and a heartless mother.'

'You shall not—*you dare not!*' gasped Maraquita, now thoroughly frightened.

'You shall see what I can *dare!*' he exclaimed wildly. 'For I will take your life and my own, sooner than give you up to another.'

And with that Henri de Courcelles walked away, and left her sitting there by herself. As soon as she was convinced he was not coming back again, Quita rose, and with trembling steps walked slowly back to the White House. He had succeeded in completely alarming her. She had never seen him like this before, and he was terrible in his anger. His black eyes had gleamed on her like polished steel,

and his hand had involuntarily sought his side, as though ready to grasp an invisible stiletto. Quita felt certain he would be capable of any violence, if not restrained, and fear lent her boldness. She would secure one friend at least in her extremity, and whatever it cost her she would confide her trouble to her mother. She found Mrs Courtney alone in her own room, lying on a sofa, with bare feet, and the last novel that had reached San Diego in her hand. But as she saw Maraquita enter the chamber, she raised herself to a sitting position.

‘My dearest child! what is the matter? You are looking quite ill again.’

‘Oh, mamma, mamma,’ cried Quita, sinking at her mother’s feet, ‘I am so unhappy!’

And then, in a broken voice, and with

her face still hidden, she told the story of her disgrace, and the danger which appeared to threaten her.

Mrs Courtney listened in silence. She had suspected the cause of her daughter's illness, and the author of her ruin, but she was hardly prepared to hear there was a living witness to her shame domiciled so close to Beauregard. Her naturally sallow complexion turned almost livid with horror, and her unwieldy frame shook with agitation. And when the girl had finished her miserable recital, all her mother could utter was,—

‘Oh, Maraquita, Maraquita, I couldn't have believed it of you!’

‘Mother, don't speak to me like that! I know I have been very wicked, but I have no friend but you, and if *you* desert me, I shall be lost. Oh, mother, save me this once, and I will do everything

you ask me in the future. You want me to become Lady Johnstone, don't you? But you must think of some means of stopping Henri's tongue, or I never shall be. I did not think he would be so spiteful and revengeful! He says he will stab me at the very altar.'

'That is all talk, my dear! he will do no such thing! He shall be sent out of Beauregard before a week is over his head; and if he dares to assail your character, your father shall have him punished for it. But listen to me, Quita. There is only one way to fight this scandal, and that is to deny everything. Now, let me understand you plainly. Are you *sure* that no one but Dr Fellows and his daughter knew the secret of this birth?'

'*Quite* sure, mamma! The Doctor told me so over and over again; and I don't think Lizzie knows *whose* baby it is—and

if she does, she has taken an oath never to reveal it—and Lizzie will keep her oath!’ said Maraquita, with complete faith in the fidelity of her friend.

‘There was no other person in the house at the time?’

‘No one, mamma.’

‘Then your course is plain. Whoever dares to mention this story to you, or at whatever time it may crop up against you, *deny it entirely*. Say you have never heard of such a thing before, and you are entirely ignorant how it could have originated. *I* — as your mother — will corroborate your statement, and we will uphold our assertion before the world. Lizzie Fellows is really the only witness that can come against you, and she will not break her promise, I am sure of that.

‘As for that villain De Courcelles, your father shall give him a summary dismissal,

and anything he may say in his rage will be taken for revenge. He can *prove* nothing. He has only his bare word to give for it, and who would believe him against your own parents? Meanwhile, dearest, the sooner your marriage takes place the better, and then you will feel safe. But whatever you do, Maraquita, never acknowledge your shame again, even to De Courcelles. You never know who may overhear it. Try to believe it has never been, and then you will act as though it had never been. As for marrying your father's overseer, it is out of the question, and like his presumption to dream of it. As if he hadn't done you harm enough already, without wishing to hamper you for life! It's like the unreasonable selfishness of men. But you may make your mind easy, my dear, your mother will save you.'

‘Oh, mamma, how I wish I could go away somewhere, and never see nor hear anything of him again!’ sobbed Maraquita.

‘So you shall, Quita, if you will only have a little patience. But cease crying now, my child, or you will make yourself ill. Lie down on my couch, and try to go to sleep. I won’t let you leave the house again until Monsieur de Courcelles has quitted the plantation.’

And with a kiss of forgiveness, Mrs Courtney left her frail daughter to repose.





CHAPTER V.

THE next morning Liz was walking up the avenue of orange trees that led to the White House, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, and her brow wrinkled with perplexity. After many hours of painful deliberation, she had come to the conclusion to take the advice of Captain Norris, and beg Maraquita to relieve her of the intolerable burden of shame she bore for her sake ; but *how* to accuse her adopted sister of her sin, troubled her

beyond measure. She felt so deeply for her youth and betrayed innocence. Such a well of divine compassion for the injured girl was mingled with her own horror of the deed, that she scarcely knew whether she should feel most inclined to commiserate with, or to blame her. Liz pictured Quita to herself writhing on the ground for very shame at the discovery of her weakness, bright-eyed, dusky-haired Maraquita, who had always seemed so much to be envied and admired, prostrate in her humiliation, and her generous heart bled in anticipation of her sister's pain. She conned over and over again the words in which she would break the truth to her, trying to make them as tender and little accusing as she could. She would endeavour (she thought) to first gain Quita's confidence, and then to make her understand that, if she would

only do what was just, in confessing the truth to her parents, Liz would be her friend, and the friend of her little daughter, to their lives' end. But what she was about to ask of Quita was a very serious thing, and she doubted if the girl's strength of mind would carry her through it.

She did not ring for admittance when she reached the White House. She had been accustomed to enter and leave it as she chose, and experienced no difficulty in finding her way at once to the chamber where Maraquita spent most of her morning hours.

This was an apartment adjoining her bedroom, and furnished more with a view to the repose which is so essential in the torrid climate of the West Indies, than to the pursuit of any active work. Its French windows, opening on the garden, were shaded by green jalousies,

through which the luxuriant creepers thrust their tendrils and their leaves; the marble floor was strewn with plaited mats of various coloured straws; the furniture consisted of a couple of bamboo lounges and a marble table, on which stood a silver tray bearing fruit and cooling drinks. The only ornaments it contained were a large mirror and a couple of handsome vases filled with roses. Everything about the room was conducive to coolness and repose; and Maraquita, attired in white muslin, with a palm leaf in her hand, and stretched full length on one of the couches, with her eyes half closed, was a personification of the goddess of Sleep or Indolence, or perhaps both.

She started, and coloured slightly as Liz slipped into the room through the verandah. Her last conversation with

Henri de Courcelles was in her mind. She had been thinking of it as Liz entered, and a secret intuition made her feel that her adopted sister would allude to the subject. A craven fear took possession of her, and made her heart beat to suffocation; but only for a moment. The next she had remembered her mother's caution and promised championship, and had resolved to carry out her advice (if necessary) to the very letter. As she sank back upon her couch, Lizzie advanced towards her with affectionate solicitude.

‘Have I startled you, Quita? I hope not. It seems so long since we met; and so much has happened since then, that I felt I must come up and see you to-day. How are you, dear? Quite strong again?’

As she sat down by the girl's side,

and laid her hand tenderly upon her arm, Quita turned pettishly away.

‘That is rather a silly question for a lady doctor to ask me, Lizzie. How can I be quite strong again after such a nasty attack of fever? I am as weak as I can well be, and mamma is going to take me up to the hill range to-morrow or next day for change of air.’

‘I am glad of that, dear. It will be the best thing for you, for you must have suffered much, my poor Quita, I am sure, both in mind and body.’

Quita did not like this thrust, but she parried it bravely.

‘Well, I *did* suffer with the fever, as you know, and the only wonder is that it didn’t kill me, as it has done so many of the coolies. It was your poor father who saved my life. And then that *he*

should go himself! I have felt that terribly, Liz. I was very fond of him. He was like a second father to me, and his sudden death has cut us all up, as well as you.'

There were tears in Maraquita's voice as she spoke, which brought the kindred drops welling up to Lizzie's eyes, and for a few moments the girls wept together as for a common loss.

'Oh, Quita,' said Liz, as soon as she could speak calmly again, 'I know that you and your father and mother have felt for me in my trouble, for, kind as you have been to us, you can never realise the depth of it. My father was my world. He stood between me and every anxiety, and now that he is gone, I feel as if I stood alone, the centre of a storm of suspicion, and accusation, and reproach.'

Maraquita paled under this allusion, but she felt obliged to say,—

‘What do you mean?’

‘Can you ask me, Quita?’ exclaimed Liz suddenly. ‘Is it possible that the rumours that are afloat concerning me have failed to reach your ears? Mr Courtney told me that he had heard them. Surely he repeated them to you.’

‘No, papa has told me nothing, and I don’t know what rumours you allude to,’ replied Quita; but had the room not been darkened to shut out the morning heat, Lizzie must have seen the crimson blood that rushed to her face with fear of what was coming.

‘Then I must tell you,’ said Lizzie, drawing nearer to the couch, while she looked cautiously about the room to be sure that no one was within hearing. ‘Indeed I came up here this morning

expressly to tell you, for the burden of secrecy and shame is more than I can bear.'

Whilst Lizzie beat about the bush, as though afraid to mention the forbidden topic, Quita had felt timid and constrained, but now that she seemed prepared to speak out, the defiance that is born of fear entered the younger girl's breast, and emboldened her to say or do anything in the defence of her honour.

'What secrecy? What shame? What have you been doing, Lizzie?' she exclaimed, with well-feigned surprise. 'You talk in riddles to me to-day.'

'Ah, you have heard nothing, Quita. I can see that. You do not know the terrible duty that has been laid upon me. But turn your face this way, dear, and let me whisper to you. Don't mind what I may say, Quita. Remember that I am

your sister, who has known you from a baby, and that I sympathise with and feel for you in any trouble or sorrow you may have to endure. You remember the night you came to our bungalow?’

‘I remember the night I was *told* I went there, Liz; but I was half delirious with the fever, and can vouch for nothing myself.’

‘I can well understand that you were half crazy with fear and pain, dearest, but it was not the fever that made you so.’

‘The Doctor said it was the fever,’ argued Maraquita, with wide-open, innocent eyes. ‘He told papa and mamma so.’

‘I know he did, for *your* sake, and that they believed it. He extracted a solemn oath from me at the same time, never to reveal what I might see or

hear that night. And I never *have* revealed it, Quita, and I never *will*. It shall lie hidden in my heart until my death. Only *you* must help me to bear it, or I shall die.'

Lizzie was sobbing now, though very quietly, behind the shelter of her hands, whilst Maraquita lay on the couch silent but pondering what she would say.

'Speak to me,' cried Lizzie presently. 'Say something, for God's sake, and put me out of my pain.'

'What am I to say?' replied Maraquita. 'You frighten me when you talk like that. Has anything terrible happened since your poor father's death, and how can *I* help you out of it?'

'I will tell you what has happened,' said Lizzie presently. 'Mammy Lila is dead, and the child is with me, and every one is talking about it, and saying

it is mine. What am I to do, Quita—what *am* I to do? I cannot speak, because my lips are closed by the oath my father made me take; and if I *could* speak, do you think I would betray my dearest friend? And can I send it from me—the poor, helpless, tender little creature who has no one to look after it and love it but myself?’

‘But whose child is it?’ inquired Maraquita, with her dark eyes fixed full on those of her adopted sister.

Lizzie regarded her for a moment in silent consternation. Was it possible that Quita was in ignorance of her child’s birth, and had her late father managed so skilfully as to keep her unaware of what had happened? Such things *had* been. But the next minute Liz had rejected the idea with scorn. At any rate Maraquita must have

known what lay before her when she found her way to the Doctor's bungalow, and if she affected ignorance now, it was only because she was unaware that Lizzie knew the whole truth.

‘Oh, Maraquita,’ she exclaimed, ‘don’t be afraid of confessing it to me, for I know everything! My father was obliged to confide in me. He could not have managed without my assistance. But my oath seals my lips to all the world but you. But is it right to keep such a secret from your father and mother, especially when doing so involves the ruin of any other woman? You don’t know what the charge of that little infant has brought upon me? Even Mr Courtney suspects my honesty. And as for Monsieur de Courcelles—’

‘What has Monsieur de Courcelles to do with it?’ cried Quita hastily.

Lizzie coloured. She had never spoken of her relations with Henri de Courcelles to Quita before, but this was no time to let feeling get the better of justice.

‘He has everything to do with *me*,’ she answered, in a low tone. ‘Quita, I have never told you before, that I am engaged to be married to Monsieur de Courcelles.’

‘*You* — engaged to be married — to *Henri*? Oh, it is not true! You are deceiving me!’ exclaimed Quita, as she sprang to a sitting position, and turned a face of ashy pallor to her companion.

But Lizzie suspected no more than she saw. She only thought that Quita was astonished that she should have been kept in the dark with regard to so important a subject, and hastened to defend her own conduct.

‘Indeed, it *is* true! I daresay you are surprised that I should not have told you,

Quita (for I have told you almost everything), but I have felt so deeply about it, that I *could* not speak ; and our engagement has never been made public, though it has lasted over a year.'

'*You—engaged to Henri de Courcelles !*' repeated Quita incredulously.

'Yes! Although he has broken it off, of his own accord, and left me, I cannot feel that I am free from him. For I love him, Quita. I love him with my whole heart and soul. I did not think it was in me to love any creature as I love him. And since we have parted, I have been unable to sleep, or eat, or drink, for longing after him,—longing, above all things, to clear my character in his eyes, even though I never saw him afterwards. Oh, Quita, I must, I *must* do this! To live on letting him think me false and frail, will kill me! If you will not help me out of this

awful dilemma, my death will be on your head.'

But the news she had just heard had hardened Maraquita's heart. All the love she was capable of feeling had been given to De Courcelles, and if he and Lizzie had combined to deceive her, why they might suffer for it. That was all she thought of, as she clenched her teeth upon her upper lip, to prevent her betraying her emotion.

'Maraquita ! won't you save my love to me ?' wailed Lizzie. 'All I ask is to clear my name in the eyes of Henri de Courcelles, and then the rest of the world may think and say what they choose.'

'I don't in the least understand what you are driving at,' replied Maraquita. 'What can *I* do to make up your quarrel ? Monsieur de Courcelles and you are both old enough to look after yourselves. If

he won't believe you, he is not likely to believe *me*.'

'But I cannot speak—my lips are sealed,' cried Lizzie wildly; 'and he will not accept my word, instead of an explanation. Don't you understand me, Quita? Henri has heard this scandalous report about the child, and believes it to be mine. He demands the name of the mother, and no one but you can satisfy him. Oh, Quita, release me from this awful vow, that threatens to ruin my character and blast my whole life! Think, dear—is it fair that I should lose everything I love and value most, because of your fault? Be brave and generous enough to share the blame with me, and I promise you before God that it shall never go any further.'

Maraquita sat straight up on her couch, and stared at her adopted sister.

'What do you want me to do? Speak

plainly, for I do not comprehend your meaning.'

'I want you to tell your parents what you have done. They will pity, and love, and forgive you, Quita, as I do. They will feel it was your youth and ignorance that were at fault, and not your heart; and you will feel happier, my poor sister, when your mother has shared your secret, and forgiven it. I want you to tell Mr and Mrs Courtney that the child in my bungalow is yours.'

'*What!*' cried Quita shrilly. 'You want me to tell a lie in order to screen yourself?'

'*A lie!*' repeated Lizzie. 'You know it is not a lie; you know when you came to us that night that you were delivered of a daughter, and that my poor father took charge of it for you. Oh, Quita, if you could see her,—her little waxen

hands and feet, her wistful dark eyes, so like your own, and her tiny mouth, which just begins to smile, your mother's heart would yearn to claim her for your own !'

For one moment Quita trembled at the picture Liz had conjured up, but the next, fear of ruining her own prospects crushed the softer feeling in her heart.

'I deny it!' she exclaimed loudly. 'I deny every word you have uttered. You are either mad, or you mistake me for some other woman. How *dare* you insinuate that I have ever had a child?'

'*You deny it!*' echoed Lizzie, rising to her feet. 'You can actually look me in the face, and deny it, Quita?'

'Most emphatically I do, and resent the insult you have laid upon me. I know nothing about the child which is in your bungalow. It may be yours, or

any other woman's, but it certainly is not *mine*; and if my parents heard you had accused me of such a dishonour, they would turn you from their doors!'

'What is all this about?' exclaimed Mrs Courtney, as she entered the room. 'Lizzie, you ought to know better than to let Maraquita excite herself with talking, when she has scarcely recovered from her late illness. She will have a relapse, if we do not take care.'

She had heard from Jessica that the Doctor's daughter had entered the house, and, fearful of what she might have come to say, had hastened to the rescue of her daughter. Lizzie stood before her, silent and confused, but Quita appealed to her mother's protection at once.'

'Mamma, just hear what Lizzie has told me. She says there is a baby at her bungalow which was left in the charge of

her father, and she accuses me of being the mother of it, and wants me to tell a lie to you and papa, in order to screen herself from suspicion.'

'*Lizzie* accuses *you* of being a mother!' exclaimed Mrs Courtney, with well-acted surprise. 'Oh, it is *impossible!* Quita, you are dreaming!'

'Tell mamma if I am dreaming, Lizzie! Repeat to her what you said just now.'

'I shall do no such thing, Quita! I said what I did to you in confidence, and I refuse to repeat it to any one.'

'Because you know how mamma would resent such a foul calumny. Oh, mamma,' continued Quita to her mother, 'what have I ever done to be accused of such a dreadful thing? What would Sir Russell say if he heard of it?'

'I cannot believe my ears,' said Mrs Courtney. 'Do I hear aright, Lizzie,

that you have *dared* to link my daughter's name with such a shameful story? What induced you to do it? Speak! I must have an answer.'

'I cannot speak, Mrs Courtney; I have nothing to say.'

'Because you know yourself to be guilty. Don't imagine that we have not heard the scandal that is abroad concerning you. But I little thought you would have the audacity to try and throw the blame upon my poor Maraquita, she who has been like a sister to you.'

'I have never denied the benefits which I and my poor father have received from your family, Mrs Courtney, nor been ungrateful for them.'

'And what do you call your conduct of this morning, then? You have deceived us all, Lizzie,—Mr Courtney, myself, and your poor father. We thought

you a pure and good girl, or you never would have been allowed to associate with my daughter.'

'I *am* pure,' interposed Lizzie, with the indignant tears standing on her hot cheeks. 'I have done nothing to make you regret the favours you have shown me.'

'Oh, don't speak to me like that, Lizzie, when you know that you are the mother of a child which you dare not own.'

'I am not! I am NOT!' cried the girl, half choked with her emotion and sense of impotency to resent the charge made against her.

'And I say you *are*,' continued Mrs Courtney, 'and all San Diego says it with me. And, not content with degrading yourself, you would try to degrade *my* daughter also. Shame upon you! Is this your gratitude? You who, but

for our bounty would have been pointed at all your days as the daughter of a felon, who have now lowered yourself beyond the ordinary level of your sex.'

'Oh, Mrs Courtney, say what you like to me, but spare the memory of my dead father!' cried Lizzie, through her sobs.

'If I have not spared it, you have only yourself, and your own conduct, to blame. I have been very good to you hitherto, Lizzie, but I can be so no longer. You have raised a barrier between us with your own hand. For the sake of his old friendship for your father, Mr Courtney wishes you to remain on the plantation, but you are no fit companion for Maraquita, and from this day you must consider the doors of the White House are closed against you.'

'You will not find me attempt to alter your decision, Mrs Courtney. I

came up here this morning to ask Maraquita to do me a simple act of justice, but she has refused it, and I can no longer look upon her as my sister and my friend, nor shall I have any wish to seek her society.'

'Insolent!' exclaimed Mrs Courtney. 'Why, under no circumstances would you be permitted to do so. Maraquita is engaged to be married to the Governor of the island, Sir Russell Johnstone. In a few weeks she will be reigning at Government House, and will receive no lady there who cannot vouch for the possession of an unspotted reputation. So now perhaps you will see the harm you have done yourself by your impudent attempt to forge off your own error upon her.'

'It would have made no difference to my behaviour, madam, if Maraquita

had already been the Governor's wife. The blameless burden laid upon me still remains, and she will not lift it by the raising of her little finger. I suppose it is my fate to suffer and be silent. But I think the time will come when Quita will be sorry she had not more pity for me to-day.'

'Mamma, mamma,' cried Quita hysterically, 'tell her to go! I can bear no more of her reproaches. It is wicked of her to speak like that. You know that I have done nothing; but if such a story were to come to Sir Russell's ears, it might ruin me for ever.'

'It shall *not* come to his ears!' exclaimed Mrs Courtney angrily; 'and if you attempt to repeat it, Elizabeth Fellows, I will have your name, and your dead father's name, branded from one end of San Diego to the other

until not a soul in the island shall speak to you. See if I do not.'

'You will never have the opportunity to carry out your cruel threat, madam. I have told your daughter, and I tell you, that my vow of secrecy to my beloved father is sacred, and nothing shall make me break it. From this hour, I shall never mention the subject to any living creature again.'

And with those words Liz turned on her heel and walked out of the White House. As she disappeared, Maraquita threw herself into her mother's arms in a burst of tears.

'Oh, I am lost—I am lost!' she cried, trembling with fear. 'We have made her angry, and she may go and tell the story everywhere, from revenge. How I wish I had never seen De Courcelles. It was wicked of him to take advantage

of me like that. And all the time he was engaged to be married to Lizzie. Oh, mother, I hate him—*I hate him!* I wish that he was dead!’

It is the proof of an ephemeral and fancied passion that directly misfortune or peril comes upon it, it turns to reproaching and dislike. There is little need to say that Maraquita’s love for Henri de Courcelles was founded on a basis of self-esteem. Had it been otherwise, their mutual error would have made her cling all the closer to him as her one haven of safety.

‘If he *is* engaged to her, my dear,’ replied Mrs Courtney, with a view to consolation, ‘so much the better. They are a very suitable pair, and their marriage would rid you of a troublesome suitor. I have heard something of it before, but subsequent events made me

think I was mistaken. But I don't like Monsieur de Courcelles. I consider him a dangerous enemy, and should be glad to know that he had settled down in life.'

'But you *promised* me that papa should send him away from Beauregard,' said Quita fearfully.

'And so he shall, my love, as soon as ever we are on the hill range. You may rest assured of that. Only we have no power to send him out of San Diego, and he may prove troublesome to us yet. However, I have my own story to tell papa, and it is one that will provide against any emergency. But the first thing to be done, Quita, is to get you away; and the next, to make you Lady Johnstone. Then we shall be perfectly safe.'

'You will take care that no one else comes in to see me to-day,' said Quita

languidly, 'for I feel quite worn out by the annoyance I have undergone?'

'Certainly, my dearest girl. Jessica shall see that you are not disturbed. And now try and sleep, Quita, and don't be afraid that there will be any repetition of so disagreeable a scene. I think I have let Miss Lizzie have a piece of my mind, and that she will see I mean what I said. Depend upon it, my dear, that no ill-natured stories or repetitions can ever harm you in the future. The girl is too honest to break her word; and if she suffers a little from keeping it, she deserves as much, for her mean attempt to coerce you. Now, you must promise me to think no more about the matter.'

Maraquita gave the required promise, because she wanted to be left alone; but as she lay in the silent and shaded room, the description that her adopted sister had

given her of little waxen hands and fingers, of two dark wistful eyes, and a baby mouth beginning to smile, recurred again and again to her, until something very like the longing of motherhood stirred in her bosom, and made her sob herself to sleep.





CHAPTER VI.

LIZ FELLOWS went home that day sadder than she had been before. Her lover's defalcation had been a natural sequence to the misfortune that had overtaken her, compared to this. He had judged her harshly, and without proof, but he at least believed (or she thought he did) that she had been untrue to him, and his anger and contempt were those of a dishonoured man. But Maraquita's conduct admitted of no such palliation. She *knew* better than any one else, that Liz was innocent of the charge

laid against her, and yet she could coolly deny the fact, and appeal to her mother to join her in turning her adopted sister from their doors. She could shield herself behind the humiliation of her friend,—deny her maternity, and delegate her sacred duties—her most holy feelings—to another woman.

‘Feelings! Duties!’ Liz stamped her foot impatiently, as the terms occurred to her mind. Maraquita *had* no feelings, and recognised no duty. She was lower than the feeble little animals, who would die sooner than desert their young. She had brought a helpless infant—presumably the infant of her lover—into the world, and would not even acknowledge it was hers. *Who* was the father of this child, thought Liz, that he could stand by quietly and see the desertion of his offspring? Had *he* no natural instincts, any more than the

partner of his sin? Would they *both* leave their infant to the tender mercies of the world, whilst they went their own ways—one, to be married to the Governor of San Diego—the other, Heaven best knew where? Well, she had staked her last chance, and lost it. Henri de Courcelles would never now receive the proof of her innocence. He was lost to her for ever, and she must bear the burden of shame laid upon her guiltless head as best she might. As she re-entered the bungalow, a wail from Quita's hapless infant smote her with compassion.

‘My poor little orphan!’ she exclaimed, as she took it in her arms. ‘You are an outcast as well as myself. You have no parents worthy of the name, and I shall never know the joy of being a mother. We must comfort each other under this great calamity as best we may.’

They say you are my little daughter, and since they say so, I almost wish you were. But I will love you like a daughter, and teach you to love me like a mother, and so you shall comfort my bruised heart, and I will try and make your life happy.'

Up to that moment Rosa had fed and washed the baby, and slept with it in her arms, but now Lizzie took all these sweet maternal duties into her own hands. She nursed it all that day, and when night came she laid it in her own bed. When it was fairly asleep, and Rosa had run over to the negroes' quarters to chat with her friends, Liz sat down to her sewing in the sitting-room, calmer and less perplexed than she had been for days past.

Up to that time she had cherished hope, but now all hope was over. She

knew the worst. It was bitterly hard to know it, but at all events suspense was at an end, and there was no new trouble to learn. As she sat by the shaded lamplight, wondering if Mr Courtney knew the name of her father's family, and if the knowledge could be of any use to herself, she heard a light footstep creeping softly along the verandah, a footstep which she recognised at once, and which she had been wont to jump up and welcome. But now Liz sat still, with burning cheeks bent over her needlework. If Maraquita wished to come to any terms with her, she must be the one to propose them. Liz had prayed her last prayer to the companion of her childhood. Presently a very low and fearful voice called her by her name.

‘Lizzie, Lizzie! Are you quite alone?’

But Lizzie refused to answer, and

Maraquita was compelled to advance into the room. She looked very white and scared, and the folds of her long mantle fell round a fragile figure.

‘Lizzie! Why will you not speak to me? Papa and mamma have gone to the theatre with Sir Russell Johnstone; but I excused myself on the plea of a headache, so that I might come and see you.’

‘And what do you want with me?’ demanded Lizzie coldly.

‘Cannot you guess? I am so unhappy at what took place this morning. I shall not rest until things are right again between us.’

‘I do not understand you, Quita! I conclude you spoke the truth this morning, or what you believed to be the truth, and I have nothing more to say upon the subject.’

‘Oh, Lizzie, have pity on me! You know it was not the truth; but what can I do? Everything that makes life valuable to me seems slipping through my fingers. I could not make up my mind to confess to my own ruin.’

‘And so you would ruin me instead—I, who have been like a sister to you? You would save your own character at the expense of mine?’

‘But not for always, Lizzie. Only let me get this marriage over, and I shall be better able to see my way before me. And I shall be rich, too, and able to reward you for your kindness. The child shall never be any burden to you, Lizzie. You may depend upon me for that.’

‘And do you suppose I would take your money?’ cried the other contemptuously. ‘Do you ask me to sell my honour? You accuse me publicly of be-

ing the unmarried mother of this child, and then offer to pay me for the disgrace. You are only heaping insult upon insult, Quita. You had better leave me before you make me forget myself.'

'Oh, no, Lizzie, I cannot leave you,' exclaimed the unhappy girl, drawing nearer to her, 'until you have heard all I have to say! You have always been my best friend, Lizzie. As a little child I used to run to you in every trouble, and trust you to get me out of every scrape. You will not do less for me now, Lizzie, will you?'

'You ask too much, Maraquita. You forget that in helping you out of this danger, I involve myself, in the way which good women dread above everything. I have done it, but it is at the expense of our friendship. I can never be friends with you again.'

'But you must—you *must*!' cried Quita,

falling on her knees, and hiding her face in Lizzie's lap, 'for your father's sake, Lizzie, if not for mine.'

'I have done it for my father's sake,' replied Lizzie, as she moved away from Maraquita's clasp. 'Do you suppose I have not been thinking of *him* all to-day, and of the promise I made him? Nothing else would have kept me silent; but it is over now, and we need say no more upon the subject. I beg of you, Quita, to leave me, and go home again, for your presence here is very painful to me.'

'Oh, Lizzie, don't be so hard! I am not the unfeeling creature you take me for. It is only fear of my parents that makes me shrink from confessing the truth. They would kill me, Lizzie, if they knew it. They would not let me live to disgrace them.'

‘Nonsense!’ exclaimed Lizzie. ‘They would do nothing of the sort. They would reproach you as they have me, and you richly deserve it. But tell the truth whilst you are about it, Maraquita. Say that you have no feeling either for your child or its father (whoever he may be), and I may believe what you say.’

‘But you are wrong,’ interposed Quita eagerly. ‘I love him dearly, and I should have loved *it* also, if I had not been afraid. And I can prove it to you, Lizzie, for I have come here to-night to see the baby, and I shall come as often as I can without exciting suspicion. Where is she? Let me see her at once.’

‘What baby?’ demanded Liz, with affected ignorance.

‘Oh, Liz! how can you ask? Why, my own baby, of course! The one you have in charge.’

‘I thought you denied this morning that you were a mother, Quita?’

‘I was obliged to do so. What could I say, with mamma or papa liable to come in at any moment? You might as well have asked me to cut my own throat. But here, alone with you, I can say anything! I confess it is mine, Lizzie, and that I knew all about it from the beginning. I told your dear father everything; and he promised that he and you should stand my friends, and prevent my secret from being published to the world.’

‘I have heard all this before,’ said Lizzie, still engaged upon her sewing.

‘And now you will let me see her, won’t you? You will let me hold her in my arms for a little while? I must not stay long, for fear that meddlesome old Jessica should come after me. You

will take me to my baby at once, Lizzie?’

‘No,’ replied the Doctor’s daughter firmly.

‘What do you mean? Isn’t she here?’

‘Yes; but you will not see her.’

‘How dare you keep me from her? She is mine, not yours.’

‘You did not say so this morning.’

‘Ah, but then I was mad!’

‘Are you prepared, then, to take your child back to the White House with you? Will you confess the lie of which you have been guilty to your parents, and exonerate me in their eyes of the charge you have brought against me?’

Maraquita shrank backward.

‘Oh, Liz! that is too much. I should destroy all my prospects at a blow by such an admission. Besides, it has nothing to do with the matter. All I want

is to see the child. Surely you will not refuse so trifling a request?’

‘I do refuse it.’

‘But you have no right to do so.’

‘By your own account, Maraquita, I have every right. You declared before your mother that this child was mine. Therefore I will keep it as such, and I refuse to let you see her.’

‘And I am determined not to leave the bungalow till I have done so!’ cried Quita, rushing towards the bedroom door.

But Lizzie had reached it before she did, and stood with her back against the panels.

‘You shall not enter here,’ she said, in a tone of authority.

Then Quita took to beseeching. She fell on her knees again, and held Lizzie tightly clasped about her feet.

‘Oh, my dear sister, let me see my

baby, if only for a minute ! I have been thinking of her ever since this morning, Lizzie,—of the dark eyes you spoke of,—the tiny waxen hands and feet, and the rosebud mouth ; and I feel as if I should die if I do not have her in my arms, and kiss her, and tell her that I am her mother.’

‘Will you tell the world so, Maraquita ?’

‘You know that I cannot.’

‘Then you will not see your child until you do,’ replied Lizzie, as she locked the bedroom door, and put the key into her pocket. ‘You have openly disgraced me by palming on me the consequences of your own sin. You have denied your motherhood, and given up your most sacred rights and duties. Well, for your sake, and to conceal your shame, I accept them ; and the first act which I exercise is to keep the child to myself.’

‘You actually refuse?’ cried Quita, starting to her feet, crimson with indignation.

‘Emphatically. There is only one way you can secure the privilege, and that is by an open confession of the truth.’

‘Then I shall never do it! And you may carry the burden to your life’s end!’ exclaimed Maraquita furiously. ‘And another with it, for you do not know all. You have never asked me the name of the father of this child! You came crying to me this morning about Henri de Courcelles, and how much you loved him, and how anxious he was to discover the parentage of my baby. He has lied to you! He has made use of this dilemma to get rid of you; for he knows whose baby this is as well as I do. He knows the mother and the father of it—for the father is *himself*!’

She watched the light fade out of Lizzie's eyes as the cruel truth smote upon her heart, and she grasped at the back of a chair to save herself from falling. But when the first shock was over, she refused to believe the story.

‘*Henri!*’ she exclaimed, in a faint voice. ‘But it is *impossible!* Henri is—is—*mine!*’

‘He pretended to be!’ cried Quita maliciously, ‘because it was a good blind for them up at the White House, I suppose, but he has been mine and mine only for the last twelve months, and he is nearly mad at the idea of losing me now.’

‘And why must he lose you?’ said Lizzie quickly, forgetting her own pain in her lover's wrongs. ‘If what you say is true, why do you not marry him, and take care of your little child between you?’

Maraquita shrugged her shoulders.

‘Because my people will not hear of such a marriage for me, and think I should lower myself by becoming the wife of an overseer.’

‘Not so much as you have lowered yourself already, Quita.’

‘Perhaps not, but nobody knows that! And then I am already engaged, so it is of no use talking about anything else.’

‘Poor Henri,’ sighed Lizzie.

‘I can’t see why he is to be pitied! He knew from the beginning that it must all end some day. But I little dreamt it would end like this. *I* am the one who has suffered all the risk and the blame, and yet no one seems to pity *me*.’

Lizzie was silent. Her heart was burning within her, and yet pride prevented her speech. It was cruelly humili-

ating to find that all the time she had been engaged to be married to De Courcelles, he had been carrying on with another girl, and had even had the audacity to make his own fault the putative cause for breaking off his engagement to her. She could not decide at the moment whether she loved or hated him the most, his conduct appeared in so mean and despicable a light.

‘You are right, Maraquita,’ she continued, after a pause. ‘He is not worthy of your pity or mine. He has cruelly deceived us both—and you perhaps the most, since even, if he loved you best, he has served you worst! Even now—in the first pitiless agony of hearing your news—I can thank God I do not stand in your position. And if you should ever think better of your decision regarding him, remember I shall not stand in your

light, for from this day Henri de Courcelles will be less than nothing to me.'

'But the child!—you will not desert the child?' exclaimed Quita, with something like maternal anxiety in her voice.

Liz shuddered.

'It will be a double burthen to me now,' she answered; 'but I have already resolved to do as my father would have wished me, and I will not shirk my self-imposed duty. I will do my utmost for the child.'

'Oh, Lizzie, you are very good! You make me feel so ashamed of myself,' said Quita, attempting to kiss her adopted sister.

But Lizzie sprung aside from her.

'Don't touch me!' she cried. 'Don't stay near me any longer, or I shall be unable to conceal the loathing I feel for your conduct! False lover—false mother

—false friend! Oh, Maraquita, Maraquita! it would have been better if God had called you to Himself when you were as innocent as your unfortunate baby! You and he, between you, have destroyed all my faith in human nature.’

And Liz, throwing herself into a chair, and laying down her head upon the table, sobbed so bitterly and unrestrainedly, that Quita, terrified at the sound, which might attract spectators to spread abroad the news of her being in the bungalow, fled out into the darkness again, and made her way back to the White House.





CHAPTER VII.

MR COURTNEY was quite as proud as his wife of the grand marriage his daughter was about to make. He was inordinately fond of Maraquita, and would have considered her a fit match for a prince of the blood royal. At the same time, he was only a planter, and it was a great thing to know that his child was going to marry the highest man in the island. He had plenty of money to bestow on her—Sir Russell Johnstone had opened his eyes when his future father-in-law

had mentioned the dowry he would receive with his bride—and when Maraquita had obtained rank and position, his best wishes for her would be gratified. He was sitting in the room which he called his office, and had just dismissed Monsieur de Courcelles, when his wife entered the apartment. Mr Courtney had had occasion to find fault with the overseer that morning. He had not attended to several important matters during the week, and seemed sluggish and indifferent to his master's orders. Mr Courtney suspected that he had been drinking also, and accused him of the fact, and De Courcelles' answers had been too sullen to please him. He was brooding over the change in the young man's behaviour, when Mrs Courtney came panting into the room. It was not often she honoured her hus-

band with her presence during business hours, and he saw at once that she had some communication of importance to make to him.

‘Well, my dear, what is it? Quita not worse this morning, I hope?’

‘Oh, no, Mr Courtney! The dear child grows stronger every hour, under the knowledge of her delightful prospects, and I am most anxious that nothing should occur to mar her recovery, for dear Sir Russell is naturally anxious to have the wedding as soon as possible.’

‘Of course; but that is for you and Quita to decide. You know that I shall spare no money to expedite matters. The sooner the dear girl is Lady Johnstone, the better.’

‘So *I* say, Mr Courtney,’ replied his wife, looking anxiously round. ‘But are

you likely to be undisturbed for a few minutes? Have you dismissed Monsieur de Courcelles for the day?’

‘Yes, and not in the best of humours. He is getting lazy, Nita, and I am not sure that he is keeping as sober as he should be. He gave me something very like insolence this morning. Do you know if anything is wrong with him? Is his engagement with Lizzie Fellows still going on?’

‘Oh, Mr Courtney, this is the very subject on which I wished to see you. De Courcelles has been behaving very badly, in my estimation. You will hardly believe, even when I tell you so, that he has had the presumption to lift his eyes to our Maraquita, and to swear he will be revenged if she marries any other man.’

‘*Impossible!*’ cried Mr Courtney, start-

ing. He had had his own suspicions respecting the young overseer's admiration for his daughter and heiress, and, on a former occasion, he had told him so, but he had never had any idea that it had come to an open avowal between them. 'Do you mean to tell me,' he continued, 'that De Courcelles has had the audacity to address Maraquita on this subject, and to make her cognisant of his affection?'

'Oh, Mr Courtney, where can your eyes be? How blind you men are! Why, he has been at the poor child's feet for twelve months past; and Quita has kept him gently off, fearing to deprive you of a valuable servant; but now it has gone too far, and I feel it is time I spoke.'

'I thought he admired her, and told him there was no hope for him, some little time back; but he assured me I

was mistaken. I offered, at the same time, to forward his marriage with Lizzie Fellows, but he declared that there was no engagement between them.'

'Then he has been deceiving you all round, and is not worthy of your trust and confidence. He *was* engaged to Lizzie. She told Quita so yesterday, only he broke it off on account of this disgraceful affair at the bungalow. But all the while he has been persecuting our poor girl with his addresses, until she is positively afraid of him, or what he may do.'

'But what can he do? Surely he has not dared to threaten her?'

'He has said he will kill her at the very altar, sooner than she shall marry Sir Russell, or any other man, and has thrown the poor child into such a state of distress and perturbation, that I feel certain, unless her mind can be set at complete

rest concerning him, it will greatly retard her recovery.'

'But it *must* be set at rest. This is quite unbearable!' exclaimed the planter, striding up and down the room; 'De Courcelles must leave Beauregard at once. I shall give him his dismissal this afternoon.'

'Not this afternoon, Mr Courtney. Wait until we are safe on the hill range, and then send him straight away. Maraquita will have no peace until she hears that he is gone.'

'Fancy the presumption of his aspiring to the hand of our daughter!' continued Mr Courtney indignantly. 'A man without a sixpence beyond his weekly stipend, and no chance of increasing that. It is the most barefaced impudence I ever heard of. He shall get the sack before he is a day older.'

‘But you will do it on some other pretence I hope, Mr Courtney. You will not bring in Quita’s name. I should be sorry for it to get known that he dared to fall in love with her. People are so ill-natured; they might say she had given the fellow some encouragement.’

‘They will not dare to say anything against *Lady Russell*,’ said the father triumphantly. ‘When do you start for the hill range, my dear; and when is the wedding to be?’

‘We go to-morrow morning. I have ordered our palanquins for four o’clock, and Joseph has arranged the coolie service as far as the Government bungalow. Quita wanted to ride up with Sir Russell, but I am afraid of taxing her strength as yet. As for the wedding, they have fixed it between themselves for the fourteenth of next month. Quita’s things cannot all

be ready, but Sir Russell is willing to take her as she is, until the trousseau is complete. I never saw a man more in love in my life. He is quite infatuated with her.'

'And well he may be, for there is not a prettier nor sweeter girl on all the islands. Well, my dear, De Courcelles must go, there is no doubt of that, unless, indeed, he will marry Lizzie Fellows. *That* would put a stop to all unpleasantness at once.'

'*Marry Lizzie Fellows!*' echoed Mrs Courtney; 'what, after he has been in love with our Quita! Well, I should be very much surprised if he could do that.'

'But he was engaged to her (as you say), or nearly so. Poor Fellows told me as much himself. And it would be but reasonable for De Courcelles to settle down. He can't have Maraquita, that's

quite certain, and he might do worse than fulfil his word to poor Lizzie.'

'What, after she has disgraced herself?'

'My dear, are you certain she *has* disgraced herself? She assured me most solemnly that child was not her own, and had nothing to do with her, and I have never known Lizzie tell a lie. It is as incomprehensible to me as it is to you, and I cannot understand my old friend Fellows leaving the poor girl in such a painful position. Still, you must not forget that I have been just as true to him as Lizzie evidently is to some other person; and we should be the last people to disbelieve her word, because she is unable to give us any further explanation of it.'

Mrs Courtney had greatly fidgeted and changed colour under her husband's kindly pleading.

'Oh, Mr Courtney, I really have no

patience with you ! Do you honestly think any woman would incur such a public disgrace, without making an effort to clear her character ? I questioned Lizzie closely myself only yesterday, and she refused to open her lips, even to *me*, who have known her from a baby. It is quite incredible, and there is only one solution of the mystery—that she pretends to possess this stern sense of honour, in order to hide her want of it.’

‘Is it possible that De Courcelles can be the father of this child ?’ said Mr Courtney musingly, hitting the right nail on the head without knowing it.

‘I daresay he is ! I shouldn’t be surprised at anything I might hear of Monsieur de Courcelles.’

‘Well, my dear, I suppose he must go,’ returned her husband, with a sigh ; ‘and I will speak to him as soon as ever you

have left the White House. I cannot have Maraquita annoyed ; and indeed if he has behaved shabbily to poor Lizzie, it is not right he should continue to live in her sight. So you may consider that matter settled.'

Upon which assurance Mrs Courtney returned to her own room, to promise her daughter that she should never again be subjected to her cast-off lover's appeals or reproaches ; and the following morning De Courcelles watched their palanquins leaving Beauregard, from the shelter of the oleander thicket. A few hours after, he walked as usual into the presence of his employer. When the day's business had been disposed of, the overseer rose to go, but Mr Courtney detained him.

'Take a chair for a few minutes, De Courcelles, I have something of importance to say to you. You may re-

member a brief conversation that took place between us a few weeks back, on the occasion of Miss Courtney's illness. I warned you that it would be wise to keep your admiration of her within bounds, and you assured me that you had done so. My wife tells me a different story. She says that Maraquita is both distressed and annoyed by your evident predilection for her, and I cannot have my daughter annoyed. Therefore I think it is best that we should part.'

Mr Courtney was an honest man by nature, unused to *finesse* or intrigue of any kind, and he had quite forgotten his wife's caution with respect to introducing Quita's name as a reason for the overseer's dismissal. He had gone straight at his fences, and the leap was over. Henri de Courcelles flushed dark crimson as the subject was thus openly mentioned to him.

‘I am quite unaware how I can have annoyed Miss Courtney,’ he replied. ‘I have not even seen her since her recovery.’

‘Is that the case?’ demanded the planter. ‘Then perhaps it was before. But anyway, as she is so shortly to be married to the Governor of San Diego, you must see the propriety of discontinuing any false hopes you may have entertained concerning her.’

‘Miss Courtney’s engagement is, then, a settled thing?’ said De Courcelles bitterly.

‘Certainly, and the wedding-day is fixed for the fourteenth of next month. My daughter will soon rank as the highest lady in the island, and any kindness which, as a young and thoughtless girl, she may have shown you (or any other friend) in the past, must not form any pretension for claiming to be on familiar terms with

the Governor's wife, or Sir Russell Johnstone might resent it as an insult.'

'I understand you perfectly, sir, and Lady Johnstone need fear no recognition of any claims I may have had upon Miss Courtney, from me.'

'*Claims!* I do not understand the term, De Courcelles. What *claims* could you possibly have upon my daughter? You are forgetting yourself. Miss Courtney can never have been anything to you but a gracious young mistress and friend.'

'That is how it may be, sir. Miss Courtney knows her own secrets best, and doubtless she has chosen wisely in electing to become the wife of the Governor. Rank and position cover a multitude of sins.'

Mr Courtney did not like the style of address adopted by his overseer, but he scarcely knew how to resent it. He was

half afraid to tell him to speak out. What if Maraquita had really been light of conduct, and employed her leisure time in flirting with his overseer? It would be a very embarrassing discovery, but not an unnatural one, when De Courcelles' extreme beauty and grace of form were taken into consideration. So he thought it prudent to change the topic.

‘Well, well,’ he said testily, ‘we are not here to discuss Miss Courtney’s conduct, but your own. You have not been quite the same as usual lately, De Courcelles. I have observed an unsteadiness, and a disposition to sloth in you, which has grieved me. Come now, let us talk this matter over like two men of the world. We will suppose you *have* had a slight predilection for my daughter. I am not surprised at it, and I do not blame you; but you must have known

it could never be anything more. Well, in a few weeks she will be married, and pass out of your life. What is the use of spoiling the rest of it for her sake? Why not settle down and make a home for yourself? If you were married, all this little unpleasantness would be smoothed away.'

'That is easy to say, Mr Courtney, but not so easy to do.'

'I don't agree with you. There is a nice girl close to your elbow, of whom I spoke to you at the same time I mentioned my daughter. I mean Lizzie Fellows. Ah, you start! You have heard this rumour about her, I suppose, in common with others, and fancy it is true. But I am sure it is not, De Courcelles. I have known Lizzie from a child, and I would stake my life upon her honesty.'

‘You allude to the infant of which she was left in charge, sir?’

‘I am glad to hear you mention it like that. It proves you believe her story. You told me there was no engagement between you, but Mrs Courtney informs me there was, and you broke it off on account of this child. But women jump at conclusions so: perhaps she is mistaken.’

De Courcelles was quite capable of defending himself.

‘Miss Fellows and I were *not* regularly engaged at the time you spoke to me, sir, nor have we been since. Only when Lizzie refused to give me any explanation concerning her nurse-child, I said in my haste that want of confidence was the death of friendship, and that we had better not meet again.’

‘And you regret so hasty a decision?’

‘Why do you ask me, sir?’

‘Because if you and Lizzie like each other, I should be pleased to see you married. I am fond of the girl, and consider her a sacred charge; and marriage would silence these cruel slanders against her, sooner than anything else. If you can make up your minds on the subject, De Courcelles, I will do for you what I promised before—raise your salary, furnish the Oleander Bungalow afresh, and settle it on you and your wife, and all these little disagreeables will be forgotten before three months are over our heads.’

‘And if not, sir?’ inquired the overseer hastily.

‘If *not*, De Courcelles, we must part. I am sorry to say it, but I shall consider your refusal (or Lizzie’s) as a proof that the less you are about the White House

in the future the better. Not the slightest taint—not even the bare suspicion of one—must rest on the fair name of the future Lady Johnstone.’

‘I understand you, Mr Courtney, and I will consider your proposal. How soon do you expect to get my answer?’

‘Not until you are quite prepared to give it me. You have plenty of time before you. My wife and daughter will be away on the hills for a month, and I have no wish to part with an old friend in such a hurry. Think of it well, De Courcelles. I will look over any of the little derelictions of duty to which I have alluded, in consideration of the disappointment which you must have suffered; but my decision is final with regard to Miss Fellows. You must either marry her, or leave my service.’

De Courcelles left the planter’s presence grinding his teeth with rage. He had

burned, while listening to his talk about his daughter's marriage and future prospects, to tell him to his face that Maraquita was, to all intents and purposes, *his* wife, and the mother of the child at the bungalow. But he dared not! He was afraid not only of the planter but of the negro population, if such a story got wind in the plantation. Revenge is sometimes very swift and sure in the West Indies, especially when the natives are in a state of insubordination. Besides, he would gain nothing by such an admission. It would not give him back Maraquita—faithless, perjured Maraquita, who, having slipped from his grasp into the arms of the Governor of San Diego, had instigated her parents, by a tissue of falsehoods, to dismiss him summarily from Beauregard. And it would have robbed him of the hope of revenge—a hope sweeter to a Spanish

Creole even than love. As Henri de Courcelles thought of it, his hand tightened over the stiletto he always carried in his belt. Banishment from Beauregard would mean to sit down for the remainder of his life under this bitter wrong, without the satisfaction of feeling he had avenged it. At all hazards he must remain near this false love of his. She should never feel secure from him. He would appear before her in her most triumphant moments, and make her tremble with the fear that he was about to accuse her openly of her secret crime. Maraquita Courtney should never know another peaceful moment, whilst he lived to terrify her. But the opportunity depended on his marrying Lizzie Fellows. Well, if it must be so, it must be so. Henri de Courcelles, strolling down the path between the rows of coffee trees, and caressing his handsome

moustaches as he went, seemed to have no doubt that he had but to ask to obtain. The conceit of men, where women are concerned, knows no bounds. Every woman, according to their creed, is only too ready to fly into their arms. The good old days when knights were not considered worthy to ask for a lady's hand until they had achieved some doughty deed to make her proud of them, are gone for ever. Yet, if a girl is particular, or indifferent, or hard to please, she is voted to be either a prude or a jilt. The rougher sex require a few hard raps occasionally, to keep them in order, and the woman who puts them in their place, confers a benefit on the whole of her kind. As Monsieur de Courcelles strolled along, his footsteps carried him in the direction of Lizzie's bungalow, and thinking no time like the present, he halted on the threshold, and

called her by her name. The recollection of how he had last left her presence made him hesitate to walk boldly into it, but he was quite confident that he had but to ask her forgiveness to obtain it. Lizzie was just about to visit her sick negroes. She was dressed in a white gown, covered with an apron and a high bib of brown holland, and on her head she wore a broad-brimmed hat, tied with a black ribbon. She looked pale and weary, but the look of perplexity was gone from her face, and her general expression was calm. She was filling her basket with such medicines as were necessary, when she heard her name called in the old familiar tones of De Courcelles. As the sound struck on her ear, she turned even whiter than before, but resentment prevented her losing her presence of mind.

‘What do you want with me?’ she demanded sharply.

‘Only a few words of explanation and apology. May I come in, Lizzie? I have been longing to do so ever since we parted.’

‘You can enter if you wish it, monsieur, but I cannot imagine what you can possibly have to say to me. I have looked upon our last meeting as a final one.’

‘But may you not change your opinion of it, and of me?’ replied the overseer, as he entered the room, and advanced to her side. ‘I know I sinned against you grossly, almost beyond forgiveness, but you must make allowance for the whirlwind of passion I was in,—for the awful doubt that had assailed me.’

‘I cannot admit that as any excuse for your conduct, monsieur. You had my word that I was innocent, and you were supposed to be my friend. There is no friendship without trust and confidence.’

‘Do not say “*supposed*,” Lizzie. I *was* your friend, as I am now, and ever will be, if you will forgive my hasty words, and reinstate me in my old position.’

‘That can never be,’ she rejoined hastily. ‘You were *supposed* to be much more than my friend, but you deceived me all along.’

‘How can you speak so? How did I deceive you, Lizzie?’

‘I would rather not discuss the subject, monsieur,’ said Lizzie, taking up her basket. ‘This is my time for visiting my patients, and they will be expecting me. I must wish you good-morning.’

‘No, no ; I cannot let you go until we have arrived at some explanation!’ exclaimed de Courcelles, detaining her by the folds of her dress. ‘You accuse me of deceiving you, and yet I thought my fault lay in being too outspoken. I know

I shouldn't have said what I did. I regret it deeply, from the bottom of my heart, and I humbly ask your pardon for the implied affront. Is not that sufficient?'

'It is more than sufficient,' replied Lizzie coolly, as she disengaged her gown from his grasp, 'and more than I wished you to say. However, I accept your apology, and we will say no more about it. Now, will you please to let me go?'

'No, you must stay! Put off your visits till this afternoon, and hear me out. I have not told you half my story. Have you quite forgotten that we are engaged to be married, Lizzie?'

'I have not forgotten it, but I have ceased to believe in it. You ruptured our engagement of your own free will.'

'But that was in my anger, and a few angry words, Lizzie, are powerless to

undo the tie which had existed for a twelvemonth. I did not mean what I said. I have regretted it ever since, and I am here this morning to ask you to forgive it, and let our engagement stand as it did before.'

He was drawing closer to her, confident in his powers of fascination, but she pushed him from her.

'Monsieur de Courcelles, I am surprised at you! I am surprised now to think that I should ever have believed in you, or thought the engagement you entered into with me anything but a blind for your more serious intentions in another quarter.'

He started backward with astonishment, little dreaming that she knew the whole of Maraquita's sad history.

'I don't understand you,' he gasped. 'I have never been engaged to any

woman but yourself. I don't desire to marry any other woman. I came here to-day with the express purpose of asking you to condone the past, and marry me as soon as may be convenient to you.'

A few weeks before, how her heart would have beat at such a proposal, how her cheek would have flamed assent, and her humid eyes have sought his with grateful love. But now she sprang aside as if he had insulted her, and flashed defiance on him to repeat the offence.

'How *dare* you?' she panted. 'How dare you speak to me of marriage—you, who have treated me with scorn and contumely?'

'But I have acknowledged my error, Lizzie. Surely you are not a woman to resent a fault for ever. You *used* to love me, I am sure of that.'

‘Don’t be *too* sure,’ she interposed hastily. ‘I loved *something*, I know,—some creature conjured up by my imagination, but not the man of flesh and blood I see before me. For I did not know you then, and no one can love an unknown person.’

‘Lizzie, you are very hard upon me! I am not perfect, any more than other men, but I don’t know what I can have done to merit such bitter taunts from you. At all events, try and know me now as the man who loves you, and entreats you to marry him. Lizzie, be my wife! Mr Courtney is aware of our attachment, and has made a very generous offer of assistance, if we marry each other. If your affection for me was ever true, you will not refuse me now.’

‘My affection for you *was* true,’ replied Lizzie, looking him full in the face ;

‘and all the more does that make me say I will never marry you now. *Never!* Not if there was not another man in the world.’

‘But *why?* Surely you will give me a reason for your refusal, Lizzie.’

‘My reason is soon given, monsieur. Maraquita — my earliest friend and my adopted sister—was here last night. She came to ask permission to see the child, of whom both of you have accused me of being the mother, and I refused her. I told her since I had to bear the blame, I would also maintain the authority over it. And then—in a moment of passion, I suppose—somewhat like that moment which influenced you basely to get out of your engagement to me by means of a lie—she told me the name of the child’s father. *Now*, do you wonder that I say that henceforth there never can be any

communion between you and me, except of the most ordinary kind. The man who could take advantage of his own sin to ruin the character of an innocent woman, will never make a good husband to anyone, and I have done with you for ever!’

Henri de Courcelles turned his face away to the open window, the dark blood mantling for very shame into his cheeks.

‘I have nothing to say for myself,’ he muttered presently. ‘I am only a man, and men are very open to temptations such as these. But if I have sinned, I have also suffered. I was led on by a heartless woman, who has deserted her child, and thrown me over for the first suitor who presents himself with money and position in his hands. I would have married her willingly, but she refused to marry me. She is an infernal jilt, with as false a heart and

tongue as ever woman had; and she has been my ruin. She is nothing to me now, and she never will be. If you took compassion on me, Lizzie, and healed my sore heart with your pure affection, you should never have reason to complain of even my thoughts straying that way. I hate the very name of her.'

'That is no palliation of your fault, in my eyes, monsieur. I should feel for you more if you told me her desertion had made you miserable. But why do you not appeal to Mr Courtney to stop this unnatural marriage? Did he know the truth, he would surely never allow his daughter so to prostitute herself.'

'What good should I effect by that, Lizzie? Mr Courtney would only banish me at once from Beauregard. Do you suppose he would give up the prospect of Maraquita becoming the Governor's

wife, for the sake of an overseer? Besides, he already suspects that I admire her, and has told me as much, with the adjointer that the only condition on which I can retain my situation is to fulfil my engagement with you, and settle down at the Oleander Bungalow as a married man. In that case, he has promised to refurnish the house, and raise my salary. So, you see, we should be very comfortable; and, if you wished it, you could retain your medical appointment over the plantation.'

'And so *I* am to be made the scape-goat to bear your sins into the wilderness, and to patch up your injured character at Beauregard! You have mistaken me altogether. I am capable, I think, of making great sacrifices for a man who loves me, but not for one who rightly belongs to another woman. You will not retain your position at Beauregard through *my* means.'

‘Then I am ruined,’ returned the overseer fiercely, ‘and I owe my downfall to you two women! You have destroyed my life between you. I shall be turned off the plantation, without a prospect of employment. And if I become desperate, it will be laid at your door.’

‘At Maraquita’s, if you please, monsieur, but not at mine. I would have clung to you through good and evil report, had you been true to me. But I cannot forget the cruel infamy you put upon me, knowing it to be false. It is a crime past a woman’s forgiveness,—a calumny that will cling to me through life, even though you married me in church to-morrow. Yet I would rather go down to the grave enduring it, than become your wife.’

‘It is finished then!’ exclaimed De Courcelles, seizing his hat and rushing from the apartment, ‘and I will trouble

you no more on the subject, now or ever,' — and the next moment he was striding hurriedly towards his home.

Lizzie trembled as he left her, but she did not weep. Her stock of tears was exhausted. And had they not been, a cry from the infant in the next room would have dried them at their fount. She summoned Rosa, who was basking asleep in the verandah, to its assistance, and with a deep, deep sigh for her dead past, lifted her basket, and took her way to the coolie quarters.





CHAPTER VIII.

JERUSHA, the East Indian coolie, sat at the door of her hut, nursing her baby on her knee, and with a very sullen expression on her countenance. Indeed, all the hands on Beauregard had borne more or less of a rebellious look of late. They had no particular grudge against Mr Courtney, who was a kind, if rather an indolent master, delegating all his duties to his overseer ; but they detested Henri de Courcelles, and the accounts of his cruelty, and selfishness, and dishonesty, formed the

staple portion of their conversation. His very beauty, and evident self-consciousness of it, the vast superiority which he assumed over them, and the rigour with which he carried out the rules of the plantation, all combined to set the coolies against him, and they thirsted to find out something which might degrade him from his office. The reports from the Fort, too, the constant attempts at rising which had to be quelled, had incited them on to imitation, and altogether the plantation workers were seething under a sense of wrong, and ripe for rebellion. Poor little Jerusha, with her handsome half-caste baby in her arms, might have furnished them with a pretext for denouncing the overseer, had not her case been too common a one amongst them. But to the girl it meant the devastation of her life. She had not courted her destiny.

She had been landed in San Diego, a poor trembling Indian coolie amongst a herd of fellow-sufferers, who had been persuaded to leave Calcutta under a promise of good wages, and plenty of food, and very little work, and after a voyage of four months (during which they had been herded between decks like so many swine), had been marched ashore at San Diego, too weak and frightened and disappointed to have any hope left in them, unless it were that they might die. They had been all standing together for hire, when De Courcelles had sauntered by and picked out the likely ones for Mr Courtney's plantation. Jerusha well remembered how he came like a prince amongst them, and how handsome he had looked in his white linen suit and broad-brimmed hat, with the blue silk handkerchief knotted at his throat, and the

crimson rose blooming in his button-hole, —and when he had stopped beside her and spoken to her in his low soft tone, she had thought him more glorious still. She had not sought him out, this poor little Indian girl, but he had pertinaciously come after her. He had asked for her the very day after she had entered the plantation, and put so many questions as to whether her hut was comfortable, and her food sufficient, that Jerusha was quite bewildered. And then he had given her new clothes, smart dresses—such as the natives love to deck themselves in—and gold earrings for her ears; and the usual consequence followed. She fell to the tempter's seductive arts. It was a sort of heaven to the poor untaught coolie to be selected from all the other girls to be the favourite of the handsome young overseer. She never

troubled her head to think how long his preference would last. She knew that he would never marry her—she would have laughed at so ludicrous an idea—and yet she fancied somehow that her happiness would never end, and was terribly disappointed and bitterly incensed when the day came that De Courcelles ordered her back to her quarters with the other coolies, and refused to make any difference between them. She had reproached him with his conduct on the occasion which has been related, but, if anything, it had had the effect of making him more severe with her, and Jerusha realised at last that all was over between them, and that she had been only a tool and a plaything to minister to his short-lived pleasure. She was pondering resentfully on his neglect as she sat on the ground, with both her hands clasped

round her knees to make a cradle for her little Henri, as she would persist in calling the child, greatly to the annoyance of the overseer. Henri was a beautiful infant, large and round and buoyant, with much more of the father than the mother in his appearance. He was gaily dressed in a short calico shirt of red and white striped cotton, with bangles on his fat brown arms, and a string of blue beads round his neck, and as Jerusha rocked him to and fro, and heard him crow with delight at the exercise, the gloom on her face would suddenly disappear, and she would seize the boy in her arms and kiss him vehemently. As she was thus amusing herself, a shadow fell between her and the setting sun, and old Jessica from the White House stood before her. Jessica had been much put out

by her young mistress leaving her behind when she started for the hill range. It was the first time such a thing had occurred, and the old nurse felt it accordingly. Had she not waited on Missy Quita, hand and foot, ever since she was a baby? and if she *had* been sharp enough to discover her secret, had she not kept it as faithfully as Missy would have done herself? And why should Missy Quita leave her behind just as she had obtained her wish and was on the road to make the great marriage that Jessica had always foretold for her? The faithful old negress felt aggrieved; and when sunset came, and Mr Courtney had gone out for his evening drive, and the White House seemed deserted, her heart turned to her old friends in the negro quarters, and she walked down to

have a chat with them, and unburden herself of her troubles.

‘Eh, Jerusha, gal!’ she exclaimed, as she caught sight of the young East Indian, ‘and how’s de baby? He berry fine boy, Jerusha. He make big strong coolie, bime-by.’

‘Coolie,’ repeated Jerusha scornfully. ‘My little Henri never make coolie boy. I tell you dat, Aunty Jess. Henri’s a lord’s son, and he’ll be gennelman, bime-by.’

‘You go ways, Jerusha; you talking nonsense! Lords is only for great ladies like my Missy Quita.’

‘Missy Quita going to marry a lord?’ said Jerusha inquisitively, as Jessica took a seat beside her.

‘Wall, he’s not quite a lord yet, but I ’spect he will be bime-by. But he’s a great rich gennelman, and the Governor

of San Diego, and that's next to being a king—jes' so! But I wish my missy take me up to hills with her. I never been lef' behind before. I can't tell why my missy think to go widout me.'

'Praps she want de lord all to herself—'

'I not interferin' wid her little games! All her life I let her do jes' as she like; and she don't mind ole Jessica! Ah, I know more dan one secret ob my missy's—you bet, Jerusha!'

'I dessay! All gals hab dere secrets, and dere lovers too. Dis lord not Missy Quita's first lover, *I* know.'

'Why, o' course not—handsome young lady like dat. But de good looks not allays de good heart. Missy not grateful, 'pears to me,' grumbled Jessica. 'She not want me any longer now she got Sir Russell to wait on her.'

‘De good looks not allays de good heart,’ echoed Jerusha; ‘you may well say *dat*, Aunty Jess. De good looks sometimes cover de debbil’s heart—like Massa Courcelles!’

‘Sakes! what you know ’bout *him*, Jerusha?’

‘I don’t know no *good* of him, Aunty.’

‘Jes’ like all de rest ob de world. I nebber could bear dat oberseer; he berry bad fellow; and dis morning he ’sulted me dreffully. Jes’ hear, Jerusha. I comin’ from White House, quiet as could be, wid nothin’ to do, now my missy gone, when I meet dat Courcelles walkin’ along and swearin’ to himself. He came straight up to me and he say, “Out ob my way, you d—d old hag! If it hadn’t been for your peepin’ and listenin’, I believe I should have had my own way. Wait till I get

you down to de cotton fields agen, and I'll serve you out for dis.'

'Laws, Aunty Jess, and what *you* say?'

'*I* say "You jes' stop dat, you bad man. I knows all about you; and you'll nebber get me down to cotton fields agen, for if you tries it, I'll blow de roof ob de Oleander Bungalow off your head, and tell de ole master ebery-ting!"'

'An' what is der to tell?' cried Jerusha, with sudden interest.

'Sakes, gal, more than *you* guess! But I don't see why I shouldn't tell you, now my missy safe, and goin' to marry de Governor. 'Sides, my missy not behave berry grateful to me. 'Tis de way wid de white folk. Why, Jerusha, dat oberseer Missy Quita's lover for ober a year, and she go out night after

night to meet him in de bungalow, as I'm a livin' woman—'

'She—go—meet—Massa Courcelles?' gasped Jerusha.

'Sure! And more, dat baby down at Doctor's bungalow no more Miss Lizzie's child than it is yours. Dat baby 'long to Missy Quita and Massa Courcelles. *I* knows! but I never tell till my missy so ungrateful as to leave me behind, and dat man swear and call me "d—d hag!" But you nebber tell nobody else, Jerusha! You keep dat secret like your life, till de wedding's ober—and then, what matter?'

'Dat baby is *his*? Oh, de false man!' cried the coolie, with flashing eyes, as she sprang to her feet, and held little Henri at arm's length. 'And dis chile ob mine, dis white-skinned boy, who

you think *he* 'long to, Aunty Jessica? Why, to that villain too! Dat's his fader! Your fine Massa Courcelles, what ruin your missy and me same time!'

'What you say, Jerusha? Your baby's fader de oberseer?'

'Sure! Didn't he favour me ober all de other coolie girls on de plantation? Didn't he give me my earrings and bangles and my Sunday shawl, and tell me I de prettiest girl he ebber see? And I fool enough to believe him, Aunty; I thinkin' he lub me allays, and be good to me, for little Henri's sake. But when he found I should hab a baby, he sent me back to de fields, and I work dere till I nearly drop. And he beat me—yes, Aunty!' shrieked Jerusha in her rage, as she turned her flaming eyes up to the

skies; 'he whipped me and my poor baby, and laughed when I dared him to strike us! And I vowed to hab my revenge on him, and I will hab it yet. Massa Courcelles shall live to wish he nebber deceived a poor coolie girl, or struck her baby! That's so!'

'And I'll help you, Jerusha, for I hate dat man, and I swore once to give him obeah water for deceiving my poor missy. And now he serve you de same—dat's twice bad; and I know anudder heart what he's broken, though she as good and pure as de white May lilies in de garden—and dat's Miss Lizzie.'

'Nebber *Miss Lizzie!*' cried Jerusha incredulously. 'Miss Lizzie do wicked ting? Why, she's de best woman I ebber see!'

'No, no, Jerusha! I not mean dat.

Only dis villain make lub to de poor gal, and promise to marry her, and now she breakin' her heart because he so false. Rosa tell me eberyting. She pretend to be asleep in verandah dis morning, and hear all they say. Miss Lizzie 'clare she nebber, nebber marry him now.'

'She miserable woman if she do,' said Jerusha. 'But hush, Aunty Jess, here come Miss Lizzie. Don't say nuffin 'bout little Henri 'fore her. She too good and sweet! She not like us! I never dare tell her who was his fader.'

As the coolie spoke, Lizzie came up to them, pale but smiling. She carried her basket as usual on her arm, and as soon as she saw little Henri, she drew a small sponge-cake from a selection of such dainties which she carried for the sick, and held it out to him.

‘What a beauty he grows, Jerusha! He will soon be out of arms now, and toddling after you everywhere.’

‘Yes, Missy Liz, he bery fine boy,’ replied the young mother, in a subdued tone.

‘Is anything the matter?’ said Lizzie, quickly glancing from Jerusha to the old nurse. ‘No bad news of Miss Maraquita, I hope, Jessica?’

‘Oh, no, Missy Liz. Missy quite well enough, I guess. ’Tis them she leave behind what feel bad.’

‘You miss her, I daresay, and the White House seems dull without her. Well, you will soon be gay enough when the wedding takes place.’

‘I s’pose so, Missy Liz. Is dat baby at your bungalow all right, missy?’ continued Jessica inquisitively.

Lizzie flushed to the roots of her hair.

She had encountered some impertinence on this subject before, and she feared a repetition of it.

‘It is quite well, Jessica, although it is very weakly, and I am not at all sure of rearing it.’

‘A good ting if it die,’ said the nurse; ‘and if all such babies died, Missy Liz—we’ve no room for them here.’

‘You shouldn’t say that, Jessica,’ returned Lizzie mildly; ‘for it may be God’s will that it should live.’

‘Better say good ting if its *fader* died!’ exclaimed Jerusha. ‘That’s the sort we’ve no room for. Ah, Missy Liz, no use you opening your eyes like dat. We know plenty on dis plantation, we do!—and we know de good from de bad too, and may de Lord help us to root ’em out.’

‘Have you any special enemy here then, Jerusha?’ demanded Lizzie.

‘Yes, I have,’ replied the coolie, with dogged determination. ‘Massa Courcelles is my special enemy, and I hate him!’

‘Monsieur de Courcelles, Jerusha? Has he been unkind to you, or done you any wrong?’

‘He has done me *dis* wrong!’ cried Jerusha, holding out her baby. ‘He has given me dis chile, and blows on the top of it!’

She would have said more, but Lizzie put her hand to her head, and, with a low cry, passed swiftly from them. The women gazed after her in astonishment. They could not understand a nature without any feeling of revenge in it,—with only the deepest pain for the sins of one it loved, and a horror of hearing them mentioned by others. They thought that Lizzie had misunderstood them, or had not heard aright.

‘Dat’s funny!’ exclaimed Jerusha. ‘Pears I didn’t put things right, or she would have smacked little Henri on the head, or killed him dead, as I’d like to kill dat baby at de bungalow.’

‘Missy Liz not one of *our* sort,’ said Jessica. ‘She allays berry quiet and gentle, but I guess she *feel* same as rest.’

‘Does she *know* about dat baby at de bungalow?’

‘I ’spect she knows eberyting, and dat dese low niggers say it is *her* chile: same as Massa Courcelles did! Poor Miss Lizzie, she’s too good for us. She oughter run a knife into him and the chile too.’

‘That’s so,’ cried Jerusha; ‘and dat’s what *I* will do for her! I full of revenge, Jessica. I like to get up some night and fire de Oleander Bungalow, and burn dat

man in his bed ! I like to stick him wid knife, same as pig—an' to make him drink poison water till he die.'

'Better give him de obeah water—dat safe and silent,' replied the nurse ; 'but you must do it secret, Jerusha. You mustn't tell anybody but me.'

'I telling no one ; but I watch and wait, and I hab my revenge. I swear it on my little Henri's head !' said Jerusha solemnly.





CHAPTER IX.

MEANWHILE Maraquita, up on the hill range, was fast recovering her equanimity. With Lizzie and the Doctor's bungalow out of sight; with her mother's assurance that De Courcelles should be banished from Beauregard before they returned to it; with recuperated health, and the prospect of a marriage beyond her most ambitious dreams, life seemed to stretch out like one long vista of pleasure before her. Hers was a shallow, frivolous nature, incapable of looking beyond the present, or

of dwelling long upon the past. She was a terrible coward though, and had she remained on the plantation, and been subjected to the entreaties and reproaches of her lover, might have thrown up everything to link her fate with his, and regretted it bitterly for ever afterwards. The marriage she was about to make with Sir Russell Johnstone was in reality far better suited to her. So long as he was attentive to her, and loaded her with presents, she didn't mind his being middle-aged and ugly, for she had very little sentiment in her nature, and no idea of love as it should be betwixt man and woman. Her notion of a lover was of some one who must be always paying her compliments, or giving her pretty things, or devising schemes for her enjoyment, and in these particulars Sir Russell was perfect. He displayed all the infatuation

and imbecility which usually attacks an elderly man who finds himself in sudden and unexpected possession of a beautiful girl ; and Maraquita could never inhale too much of the incense of flattery. She bridled, and simpered, and blushed under his adoring glances, as if she had never been subjected to such an ordeal before ; whilst Mrs Courtney would entreat ‘ dear Sir Russell to spare her little girl such a battery of admiration, or he would frighten her back into her shell.’ Quita was beginning to give herself also all the airs and graces of a Governor’s wife, and to hold her head above even her own mother. The Government Bungalow was charmingly commodious, and filled with official servants, whom the little lady ordered about as if they already belonged to her ; and in fact she had already reconciled herself so effectually to her new

position, that she had almost forgotten that which was just past, and which she was ready to try and believe had never existed. She rode with the Governor, and walked with him, and smiled at his compliments, and even suffered him to embrace her, without the least display of repugnance or dislike. Not that the recollection of Henri de Courcelles had entirely ceased to trouble her. She thought of him often, but with no warmer feeling than fear. She would start, every now and then, in the midst of her occupation, to remember the threat he had made her, and to shiver under the apprehension that he might fulfil it. She would run at such times to her mother, and implore her to find out if De Courcelles had really left their service, and if he had quitted San Diego, or was lingering round Beauregard. She declared that she never could summon

courage to be married until she knew that there was no fear of her former lover way-ying her on her way to church, as he had sworn to do, and perhaps injuring or frightening her into a betrayal of the secret between them. Mrs Courtney became so anxious at last that her daughter's mind should be set at rest, that she asked her husband to join them on the hills for a few days, thinking it would be safer to confer with him on the subject by word of mouth, than through a letter. Mr Courtney came up as soon as his business would permit him, and the first moment his wife had him to herself, she broached the distasteful subject.

‘What have you done about De Courcelles, Mr Courtney? Have you given him warning to leave us?’

‘I have, my dear, for I feel very dissatisfied concerning him. I sent for him

as soon as you had left home, as I told you I should, and informed him that reports had reached me concerning himself and Maraquita that I could not pass over without comment.'

'Oh, Mr Courtney! I *begged* you not to use our dear girl's name.'

'Well, I couldn't tell him a lie, Nita, and I really could invent no better excuse for sending him away. So I thought honesty would be, as usual, the best policy.'

'But what did he say to it?' demanded Mrs Courtney breathlessly. 'Did he deny the fact, or—or—tell any falsehoods about it?'

'Not that I am aware of. He neither admitted nor denied the truth of my statement, but I could see from his manner that it had hit home. So I told him he could stay on the plantation on

one condition only, and that was that he fulfilled his engagement with Lizzie Fellows.'

'I *wish* you hadn't,' replied his wife, with a look of vexation. 'I don't want him to stay, under any circumstances. Things can never be the same again between us after the avowal of his impudent pretensions, and I can't see how the matter would be improved by his marrying Lizzie Fellows. In fact, Mr Courtney, I think you should also try and provide for Lizzie elsewhere, for Quita can hardly notice her when she is Lady Johnstone, after what she has done.'

'Nita, I don't believe she has done anything she need be ashamed of. I have full faith in Lizzie, as I have told you before, and I will not insult her by a suspicion of wrong. However,

with regard to her marrying Henri de Courcelles, you may set your mind at rest, for she has refused him.'

'Lizzie has *refused* to marry De Courcelles?' exclaimed Mrs Courtney, with amazement.

'Have I not said so? De Courcelles seemed quite ready to accede to my proposal, and I gave him a week to settle it in. Before a couple of days were over our heads, however, he came to tell me that it was of no use, and Miss Fellows had refused to have anything to do with him. I told him I couldn't go back from my word, and that (under the circumstances) I refused to retain him on the plantation as an unmarried man, so I would pay him a quarter's salary, and he must clear out in a week. But before I did so, I walked down to Lizzie's bungalow, and had a very

plain conversation with her on the subject.'

Mrs Courtney's complexion faded to a dull yellow.

'About the nurse-child? Does she still deny that it is hers?'

'Emphatically, and with such undeniable sincerity, that I quite believe her. I would stake my life that she has nothing to do with that child except to take care of it. She is a most injured woman, in my opinion, and I urged her, for her own sake as well as ours, to do as her father (were he living) would command her, and reveal the name of the mother of the infant.'

'Oh, Mr Courtney, how *very* wrong of you to try and make Lizzie break her oath! Why, it would be *perjury*!' cried Mrs Courtney, virtuously indignant, and trembling with anxiety, 'and I would

rather think she had fallen, than commit such a crime. Surely she was not so weak as to be persuaded to do such a thing ?’

‘No ; she is adamant, and her lips are closed like a vice. She refuses to say anything upon the subject, excepting to reiterate her former assertion that the child is not hers. And she told me the reason she had rejected Monsieur de Courcelles’ proposal is because he has said the same thing of her as other people.’

‘Well, of course. What can she expect ?’ said his wife, looking infinitely relieved. ‘It is very hard on the poor girl, but she is bound to keep her oath ; and people *will* talk. I have heard the coolies speaking of it in the most confident manner, as if they had not the slightest doubt that she is the baby’s mother.’

‘I’d like to hear a coolie talking of her affairs in *my* presence!’ returned Mr Courtney, clenching his fist. ‘He wouldn’t talk again in a hurry. If I can’t do anything else for the daughter of my poor dead friend, I will protect her. But there was something Lizzie said that somewhat puzzled me, Nita. In speaking of De Courcelles, she used these terms,—“*He*, who of all others should have died before he accused me of a crime of which he *knew* I was guiltless.” She emphasised the word “*knew*” so deeply that it attracted my attention, and I asked her *how* De Courcelles should *know* of her innocence above other people. But I could get nothing further out of her. She blushed to her eyes, poor girl, and was silent; but I was sure she felt she had gone too far. What can De Courcelles know for certain, Nita? Is it

possible he can have anything to do with this mysterious little stranger at the bungalow?’

‘Dear me, Mr Courtney, how can *I* answer the question?’ exclaimed his wife pettishly. ‘I don’t see anything peculiar in Lizzie’s words. She meant, doubtless, that being her betrothed husband, he should have had more faith in her virtue; and so he should. But men judge women by themselves, and so we seldom come off scot-free. But are you going to get another overseer? *That* is the most important thing to me. I can’t think of that De Courcelles’ presumption with any patience.’

‘Yes, yes, my dear! it is all settled, and he leaves us next week. I have already engaged his successor—Mr Campbell, who used to manage the Glendinning estates before old Mr Houston died. He bears

an excellent character, and, I trust, may prove all we require. He is noted for his kindness to his coolies; and I am afraid De Courcelles has not raised the character of Beauregard in that respect.'

'Oh, he is a wretch all round!' cried Mrs Courtney; 'and I shall not breathe freely till he is gone. I hope he will leave the island altogether.'

'That I cannot tell you, for I have nothing to do with his movements after he quits the plantation. I think he is sure to do so, however, as he is not a favourite in San Diego, and would find it difficult to get another situation here. But let us talk of something more pleasant, Nita. How is our Maraquita getting on with the Governor? Is it all plain sailing?'

'*Plain sailing?*' echoed Mrs Courtney.

‘What a term to apply to it. Why, they positively *adore* each other, my dear, and are never happy when apart. Sir Russell is only *too* charming. He follows Quita about everywhere, and waits on her like a slave. He has given her the most exquisite diamond pendant, and an Arab horse that cost him two hundred pounds. I am longing to see our darling installed as the mistress of Government House. Sir Russell means to go over to Trinidad for the honeymoon. The Government steamer will take them on board directly after the wedding-breakfast; and they will be absent for a month. The day after they return to Government House, the marriage will be celebrated by a splendid ball. He is going to issue invitations to everybody in the island—high and low. Isn’t it noble of Sir Russell? But he says he would ask the whole world, if he could,

to witness his triumph in the possession of so lovely a bride.'

'I don't wonder at his enthusiasm,' exclaimed the father, 'for he has got the loveliest girl in the British possessions! But what about her fal-lals, my dear? Can they be got ready in time?'

'Only just enough to go on with, Mr Courtney; but Sir Russell is as impatient as a boy of twenty, and refuses to wait a day over the month. I have sent my orders to England, as you desired me; but, of course, they can't be here in time. The wedding-dress I can luckily supply. Perhaps you have forgotten the exquisite dress of Honiton lace you gave me when the dear child was born. I am having it made up over white satin; and she could wear nothing, Sir Russell says, more elegant or appropriate. As the happy event is taking place in the hot season, Mara-

quita can wear nothing but white muslin and lace, which I shall have no trouble in procuring for her; and by the time the rainy season sets in, her dresses will have arrived from England. Really, Mr Courtney, it seems as if the fates smiled upon her, for nothing could be more fortunate than everything has turned out.'

The planter acquiesced in his wife's opinion, and the few days he spent on the hills confirmed it as his own. No two people could appear to be happier than Quita and her *fiancé*. She suffered herself to be loved, and caressed, and petted to any extent; and Sir Russell was always ready to gratify her. Her proud father thought she looked lovelier than ever, under the consciousness of her coming honours, and went back to Beauregard fully satisfied that she was the most fortunate girl in the world. But as the

time passed on, and the moment drew near when the mother and daughter must also quit the hills, Quita's agitation became very apparent.

'Mamma,' she would say, in a horrified whisper, clinging fast to her mother's hand, 'are you quite, *quite* sure *he* has left Beauregard?'

'Quite sure, my dearest. Your father sent him away a fortnight ago, and Mr Campbell, the new overseer, is living at the Oleander Bungalow in his stead.'

'But might he not be hiding somewhere near? At Shanty Hill, or in the Miners' Gulch? There are public-houses in both those places.'

'Quita, my child, you must get over this foolish fear. In the first place, your father is quite convinced that De Courcelles has left San Diego, as there is no

vacant situation in the island for which he could apply ; and in the second, even if he were in the neighbourhood he would not dare to speak to you, far less to try and injure you.'

'Ah, mamma, you don't know Henri ! You should have seen his eyes when he said he would stab me at the altar. He is terrible when he is in a rage. And I feel convinced he will keep his word. He will hang about Beauregard till my wedding-day, and then he will hide in the church and shoot me, and I shall die in my wedding-dress, bespattered with blood !' replied Quita, relapsing into tears at the awful picture she had conjured up in her imagination.

'Quitá, you will make yourself ill if you go on like this !' said Mrs Courtney, with grave solicitude. 'You are really too silly to be reasoned with. Do

you forget you are going to be the Governor's wife? You are not going to marry a nobody, but a man high in position and power, and no one will dare to assail you either by word or deed. The church in which you are married will be lined with the military; and if you are nervous, Sir Russell will have a special guard of honour to protect you. But don't let *him* guess at any of your nervous fears, for Heaven's sake, or he may get curious to learn the cause of them. Rely on me, Quita, that all will be well.'

'But there is another thing, mamma,' said the girl, after a pause. 'I am horribly afraid that old Jessica knows too much. One night when—when—I had been at the bungalow, I found her awake and watching for my return. And two

or three times she has muttered hints that I could not misunderstand.'

'Oh, Quita, Quita, what trouble you have got yourself into. It seems as if we should never surmount the difficulties in our path. I shall know no peace until you are Lady Johnstone.'

'Nor I either, mamma! But can't we send Jessica away too? I don't intend to take her to Government House, and you will have no use for her when I am gone.'

'My dear, I am afraid it would be dangerous to dismiss her. She would guess the reason, and these negroes are very revengeful. They will serve you to the death, so long as you make them your friends; but once turn round on them, and their malice knows no bounds. Jessica has been with you since your birth, and to send her adrift just as you

are going to be married, would be to set her tongue going like a mill-wheel. No, Quita, you must pursue a more politic course! I think we made a mistake in not bringing Jessica up to the hills with us. Had I known what you tell me now, I would not have consented to her being left behind; but you must take her some presents when we return, and do all in your power to conciliate her. Don't encourage any familiarity, nor appear to understand any hints she may give you, but keep her in a good temper, my dear child, until after the fourteenth, whatever you do.'

Acting on her mother's advice, Maraquita took a gaily - coloured shawl and a necklace of gilt beads to Jessica when she returned to the White House, and made the old nurse's heart repent that she had been led into repeating any

scandal about her missy. But the departure of the overseer was too important an event to be passed over in silence, and Maraquita was doomed to hear a repetition of what was thought concerning it in the coolie quarters.

‘Missy seen de new oberseer?’ Jessica commenced, the first moment they were left alone. ‘He berry fine man,—broader den Massa Courcelles, and plenty more colour in face; nice hair too—same colour as de carrots—and a soft voice, kinder like a woman’s.’

‘No, Jessica, I haven’t seen him yet; but papa has asked him to dine with us this evening.’

‘Ah, Missy won’t like him same as Massa Courcelles, for sure,—but Massa Campbell good man for all dat, and Massa Courcelles berry bad man—all de niggers dance when he go ’way, and

Jerusha she throw mud after him, and frighten his horse so he stand right up on his two legs.'

'Was he hurt?' cried Quita suddenly.

However frivolous a woman may be, she cannot quite lose all interest, at a moment's notice, in the man she has loved.

'Oh, no, missy! Massa Courcelles same like part of horse. He nebber thrown; only, he swear and curse plenty at Jerusha.'

'Who *is* Jerusha?' asked Quita, betrayed by curiosity into forgetting her studied reticence; 'and why should she throw dirt at Monsieur de Courcelles?'

'Ah, missy not knowing. Jerusha only a poor coolie, but all de niggers would throw dirt at Massa Courcelles if they dared. But he been berry bad man to poor Jerusha — same as he been to

my missy,' added Jessica, in a lower tone.

Maraquita turned deathly white.

'How has he hurt Jerusha?' she asked, in spite of herself.

'He's left her with a baby, Missy Quita—a nice baby, too, most as white as himself, with his eyes and hair; but Jerusha feel bad about it, 'cause he's treated her berry cruel, and whipt them both with de cowhide.'

Maraquita turned her head aside, and burst into tears. She would have given worlds that the old nurse should not have witnessed her emotion, but she could not restrain it. How true it is that the love of most women is founded on vanity, and that even if they do not want a man themselves, they cannot bear that any one else should have him. Besides, this degrading *liaison* with a

coolie girl had taken place at the very time that Henri de Courcelles had been swearing eternal love to herself. Quita did indeed feel at that moment that she had parted with a woman's best possession for nothing. She had never been so terribly humiliated before. Jessica was not slow to take advantage of her young mistress's weakness.

‘Don't cry, missy,’ she said; ‘dat man not worth one tear from my missy's bright eyes. He false and cruel, and got bad heart. Missy forget all about dis trouble when she marry de Governor. And Missy Liz will keep de secret, nebber fear, and old Jessica too. Nobody tell nuffin, de Governor nebber know, and den eberyting go right.’

But this allusion roused the instinctive fear in Maraquita's bosom. She forgot her mother's caution, and the folly of

resenting the old nurse's hints. She forgot everything, except the awful fear of exposure, and in her alarm she played her worst card, and turned round upon Jessica like a fury.

‘What do you mean by speaking to me like that?’ she panted. ‘How *dare* you pretend to think that I cried because I was in trouble for any one but the poor coolie girl? I know I am a fool to feel such things. Any one is a fool who wastes a tear on you coloured people, for you are all false, and mischief-making, and scandalous; but it is too bad that you should speak as though I were crying for myself. What trouble could I be in? I have everything I want, and in a few days I shall marry the Governor, and none of you will dare to say a word against me; and if you do, Sir Russell will have you whipped, and put in prison,

and you may lie and die there, for aught I care.'

It was a foolish and childish rage in which she indulged, but Quita was not much raised above the coloured people she professed to scorn, either in intellect or education. Yet it was sufficient to excite the desire for revenge in the object of her wrath.

'Missy have me whipped and put in prison?' she shrieked; '*me*—who hab nursed her in my bosom, ever since she was a tiny baby? Oh, no, Missy Quita, you nebber mean dat! I will tell Massa Courtney, and de Governor, eberyting before dat. I tell dem all I know. I clare de character of poor Missy Liz, down at de Doctor's bungalow, and I tell *whose* child dat is what she nurse day and night.'

'Oh, Jessica!' cried Maraquita, fright-

ened beyond expression, as she threw herself on her knees before the old negress, 'don't say that. I was beside myself. I didn't stop to weigh my words. I know you are good and faithful, and will be true to me, and keep my terrible secret, for you wouldn't ruin your poor little missy who loves you; would you, Jessica?'

But the old negress was not to be so easily conciliated. She looked very surly, even whilst Maraquita's white arms were wreathed about her withered neck.

'Missy Quita, you berry ungrateful gal,' she murmured presently. 'How many nights I sit up and watch and wait, while you flirting wid dat overseer, fear your moder or some one come and find you out? Den when you taken bad, ole Jess know your trouble all de time, and nebber speak one word. But now you going

to be grand rich lady, you want to kick old Jessica out, and forget all she done for you. But I won't be kicked out, Missy Quita. You must take me to Government House, and give me good wages, or I won't keep your secret any longer; and it isn't no good saying I'm ungrateful, missy, 'cause you were ungrateful first, and you knows it.'

Maraquita saw the terrible mistake she had made, when it was too late. Why had she not remembered her mother's advice to conciliate the old negress until the marriage was an accomplished fact? *Then*, Mrs Courtney would have devised some plan to keep her quiet. But now there was but one course open to her,—to promise to give Jessica everything she demanded, however unreasonable.

‘Why, of course, Nursey,’ she answered, with assumed playfulness. ‘Did you think I was going to leave my old darkey behind? What should I do without you? You shall come to Government House as soon as I am settled there, and dress me in the mornings, as you have always been used to do; and perhaps some day you may nurse my little children as you nursed me. Will that content you, Jessica?’ she added, with trembling lips that ill-concealed her anxiety.

‘And missy will raise my wages?’ demanded the negress; ‘Governor’s lady give better wages than planter’s daughter, and I hab worked for eighteen long years in your service, Missy Quita.’

‘Yes, yes! You shall have any wages you like, Jessica. I shall tell Sir Russell

what a good servant you have been to me, and he will be proud to reward you. But perhaps you would rather have a pension,' said Quita wistfully, 'or a lump sum of money, that will enable you to go back to your own country, and live there.'

'No, missy; I rather live and die with you. You seem like my own child to me, and San Diego like my country. I no want go way; and if missy good to me, I keep her secrets always, and no one shall hear ole Jess tell de truth about her.'

Maraquita felt this was only a compromise, but she had no alternative but to accept it. There was a hard, stony look in old Jessica's eyes that alarmed her, and made her doubt her promises of fidelity. She was not slow to perceive, either, the mercenary motive of

her demand for higher wages, but she could not afford to comment on it. She had put herself in the power of another woman—the most terrible bondage the sex is ever subjected to—and she saw no way to loosen her chains, except by perfect acquiescence. But she loathed the old negress, even while she forced herself to caress her. The affection of her whole life seemed to have faded beneath the ordeal to which it had been subjected. Jessica was no longer the kind and faithful nurse who had tended her from her infancy, and to whom she had run in every dilemma, but a hard and grasping creditor, who had possession of that which might ruin her life, and demanded her very blood in ransom. However, there seemed no way but one out of the scrape, and so Maraquita promised to do all and everything

that the negress might require, and tried to soothe her ruffled feelings with soft words and caresses.

But she did not feel sure that she had succeeded, even though Jessica paid her some honied compliments in return, and lay down in her bed that night longing more than ever that the wedding-day had come and gone.

All went smoothly, however. No one saw or heard anything further of Henri de Courcelles, nor was Quita even annoyed by the mention of his name. He seemed to have totally disappeared from Beauregard, and Mr Courtney fully believed that he had left the island. The old nurse made no further disagreeable allusions to the past, and appeared to be as devoted to her young mistress as she had ever been, so that Maraquita

regained her lightness of heart, and turned her attention entirely to the brilliant prospects before her. The fourteenth was close at hand, and the preparations for the Governor's wedding, which was to take place in the Fort church, were on a scale of magnificence never before attempted in San Diego. The church was to be embowered in flowers; the military were to line the road leading to it; half the gentry in the island were to be engaged in singing a choral service; and a splendid barouche, drawn by four horses, and preceded by a guard of honour, was to convey the newly-married couple back to Beauregard.

Here, naturally, all were in a flutter. Mrs Courtney, never a good housekeeper, was nearly out of her mind over the wedding-breakfast and the completion of

Maraquita's dress, and was thankful to delegate the issuing of the invitations to her husband and her daughter. Mr Courtney made out the list of names, whilst Maraquita wrote the invitations in a very irregular hand on gold-edged paper. Half-way down the list she came upon the name of Miss Fellows.

'*Lizzie?*' she exclaimed, with rather rashly expressed astonishment.

'Of course! why not?' returned her father quickly.

'Well, because, although *we* don't believe the reports about her, papa, *other* people do, and some of the ladies of San Diego might object to meet her.'

Mr Courtney consigned the ladies of San Diego to a warmer region, but held to his determination.

‘There shall be no festivity held in my house to which Lizzie Fellows is not invited,’ he answered sternly; ‘and the fact that she is still welcomed here, will be the best denial of these infamous calumnies against her. I should be ashamed of you, my daughter, if you consented to her name being omitted from our guests. The poor girl has suffered enough from the death of her father, and the rascality of that scoundrel De Courcelles, to say nothing of these cruel rumours, without our turning our backs upon her.’

The mention of De Courcelles’ name was enough to stop Maraquita’s tongue, and she wrote the invitation without further comment. Only, as both she and her mother anticipated, Lizzie’s reply was in the negative. She made her recent loss the excuse for not join-

ing in any gaiety ; but Maraquita and Mrs Courtney knew that after the insults they had hurled at her, she would never place her foot voluntarily again within the walls of the White House.

END OF VOL. II.





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